


# Mary's Martha

## A biblical monologue

Laura Funk

Hello, my name is Martha of Bethany, and I'd like to tell you a story about the time I met an insightful and compassionate rabbi named Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

We had heard that the rabbi was coming our way again; he had often stayed with us. I wanted every detail of his stay to be wonderful, so I went all out. I got out my best recipes and my best dishes. I had heard the story he told of the "good Samaritan," and I knew that Jesus valued generous



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hospitality. I wanted Jesus to notice that I was like the person who cared for others, even strangers. I wanted to impress him with how hard I worked to show hospitality to him and his friends. Maybe he would use me as an example in one of his parables someday.

I made to-do lists; I bought ingredients; I cleaned the house. I enlisted my sister Mary's help and assigned her many tasks. At first, the work was going well.

But after a while, my stress grew. I stopped seeing Mary as a friend and companion. I started to boss her around and criticize her. Mary tolerated it and tried to help me, but it was wearing on her.


When the rabbi finally arrived, I wasn't nearly ready. A group gathered outside, and I could see that there would be even more people than I expected. I sighed inside and doubled-down on my efforts—I could not possibly disappoint Jesus! Then I caught sight of Mary, relaxing at Jesus's feet. Well, I lost it. I couldn't pull this meal off without her help. I needed her in the kitchen helping me. After all, didn't Mary want credit from Jesus for her excellent service, too? I tried to catch Mary's attention in subtle ways, but she was not paying attention to me. So, finally, I went out and

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1 A version of this article is also part of a published collection of Midrashic Monologues and Guided Meditations called *People and Places of Sacred Interior Spaces* (2021) and can be purchased at [www.ButterflyJourneys.ca](http://www.ButterflyJourneys.ca).

confronted Jesus. I demanded that he send Mary back to help me so that all these people could eat.

Jesus stopped his teaching and looked up at me. Then he stood up and took my hands in his, and he looked me right in the eyes. Suddenly, I was embarrassed, but he looked at me with tenderness that gave me courage to meet his gaze. He called my name. Twice. He looked deep into my heart and told me what he saw there. He noticed my hospitality, that's for sure, but he also saw my motives. He perceived that I was doing all this to impress him. He told me it's not busy-work that impresses him but, rather,



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the orientation of someone's heart. He looked at Mary, sitting at his feet, and told me that her heart was true.

Slowly, I came back to my own heart. I realized I had treated Mary unkindly. I had tried to conscript her into my own plans without seeing her heart. I had also misjudged the rabbi, thinking that he would be impressed by my fancy cooking, rather than simple kindness. He turned my world upside down that day. He showed me that the intentions

of the heart and the way we treat each other are much more important than gourmet meals and a tidy house. I had shut joy out of my heart. He let it back in. Instead of shaming me, he saw me for who I was and told me what I needed to hear. He helped me come back to myself.

What happened next was a miracle! Jesus took me back inside and looked over the kitchen. He saw what I was trying to do. He knew how badly I wanted to impress him. He looked at me with in a twinkle in his eyes, paused, and suggested a simpler menu. What he did next took my breath away. He told Phillip, Judas, and James to slip into the kitchen and help. "But my pots!" I protested, weakly. Jesus smiled at me and said, "Your pots will be fine." He led me back to the courtyard and invited me to sit with Mary. Deep in my heart, that's where I wanted to be, to learn from this amazing teacher about how to live into God's reign. Time with him always seemed so short; I wanted more of his teachings, his presence, his wisdom.

The disciples didn't do too badly in the kitchen. It wasn't as fancy as I had planned, but everyone had enough, and nothing was burned. They even helped clean up. Jesus really was teaching a different kind of way!

I had asked Jesus to tell Mary what to do. I realized later I was trying to hide behind Jesus's authority, rather than take responsibility for my

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own. It wasn't fair to ask Mary to give up such a treasure—an opportunity to sit at Jesus's feet and learn. In my heart of hearts, I knew that Jesus wouldn't send her back to the kitchen. I was overwhelmed by the work I set out for myself when something entirely different was needed. Time with Jesus was short. We both needed to be at his feet, learning from him, growing more deeply in character and love.

I still sometimes forget about other people's hearts. I still sometimes get bossy with Mary. But I remember that day when my heart felt different. I remember how Jesus showed me how to care about others. Then I feel deep gratitude for how he treated me. I remember how he looked at me, and I try to look at others like that too.

### **About the author**

Laura Funk is a graduate of Canadian Mennonite Bible College ('94) and Canadian Mennonite University ('17) and an alum of Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary ('16). She is currently the Spiritual Director in Residence for Mennonite Church Manitoba and has a private practice through Butterfly Journeys. She lives in Treaty 1 territory with her husband, Gilbert Detillieux, and their turtle. Laura enjoys knitting, chocolate, languages, hiking, and, most of all, accompanying people on their spiritual journeys.