



EGLWYS GADEIRIOL TYDDEWI
ST DAVIDS CATHEDRAL

Croesawu ymwelwyr fel pererinion – Welcoming visitors as pilgrims

27 July 2023

**The Dean's Address for Chapter Day
Martha, Mary and Lazarus of Bethany, Companions of our Lord**

I was rather pleased to see in 'The Revised New Calendar And Collects', produced by the Standing Liturgical Commission last year, that the attribution of this day has been tinkered with, to add Lazarus alongside his sisters Martha and Mary - though they haven't adjusted the collect to include him other than by implication, alas!

This family was so very close to Jesus, and especially in the last days before his crucifixion, when it seems he spent each night in the home. They, through their own journeyings with him through death and bereavement and life again (even though to a life still mortal), perhaps more than any others, gave him a place where he could safely contemplate his own impending death. And I often wonder whether this Mary, who 'chose the better part' of sitting at Jesus' feet with his disciples, was the only one who had truly heard and understood when he had spoken of the inevitable suffering and death of the Messiah – and so was able to anoint him for it in the way we heard in our gospel reading, in effect saying, 'if this is the path you have chosen, then I honour you in it.'

Mary, Martha and Lazarus - like any family, different characters and personalities and sometimes frictions between them! It is for us to find our place alongside any of them.

At times, perhaps we are like Mary: still, attentive, before the Lord. Tuesday afternoon's heywonderful service celebrating our 900 year Callixtus II anniversary may have been such a time for you. Or perhaps we yearn to be like more her, on those days, in those seasons, when we are more like Martha, overcome with business and distractions. And yet Martha was the one who, at Lazarus' death, had prompted Jesus to say 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.' He then asked, 'do you believe this?' and she responded, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the son of God, the one coming into the world.' Ah, to have, to find, such faith in and through the midst of our busyness!

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And then there is Lazarus! Are there not times when we feel we are ailing, and Jesus does not come to us?! When we are overwhelmed, going under, feeling we are dead in the water ... individually, in the life of the cathedral, diocese and church, in the world as a whole, the struggles of the economy, and its impact on our lives here ...

But after death comes life, comes the rich feasting of our first reading, with its assurance that death and destruction cannot hold us for long. Like the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews, we also know Jesus as our pioneer, our pilgrim guide through the sufferings on the journey to salvation. We, like Jesus, put our trust in God the Father; and we put our trust in Jesus, through whom the power of evil and death is destroyed.

This is not just abstract pie in the sky, for when we die. Resurrection life breaks in on us now. It is for us to grasp it: to soak in it as Mary did at Jesus' feet; to recognize it and own it in the midst of busyness as Martha did (and we are still called to hard work in the vineyards of the Lord, and to be wise as serpents not merely innocent as doves, in all the tasks and responsibilities entrusted to us); or even, when we feel we're not so much soaking as drowning – going under, like Lazarus, with no knowledge of when new life might finally come – to reach out and hold on tight.

All this is because, while Jesus said to his disciples in our gospel reading that he would not always be with them, the risen and ascended Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us, is always with everyone, everywhere, who hears his call to follow and responds to the invitation of his outstretched hand.

The life of this Cathedral has been very hard since COVID. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that last year was perhaps the hardest, though we didn't fully recognize it at the time. The difficult journey continues, though, particularly with the increase in visitors and their generosity, and the hard work of the welcomers; the diligence of budget holders across our various departments; and the ongoing restructuring of funding for Welsh cathedrals; the light is beginning to dawn. But we must hold our nerve and keep going on the tough road that still lies ahead, through the tunnel that is still dark and difficult.

At this point, as we continue on this challenging journey I want to say a huge thank you to colleagues, staff, volunteers, and all who love and support this place in such a myriad of ways. We would not be St Davids Cathedral without you. I give thanks to God for you all.

So then, the feast of Martha, Mary *and* Lazarus: whichever one you feel like, in the big sweep of life or in any particular moment, take note that 'The *Revised* New Calendar and Collects' has made one more addition, in the naming of the Feast. This family are not just 'of Bethany', they are also known as 'Companions of our Lord'. Above all else, may we, all who are associated with this place, be known above all else as Companions of our Lord. Amen.

Isaiah 25.6-9; Hebrews 2.10-15; Psalm 49.5-10,16; John 12.1-8