

We call the narrative for Sunday's Gospel, "the raising of Lazarus." When we listen, emotions collide as we hear the complexity of being human during illness and death. We also hear the power of Love to transform life in an encounter with Jesus. The narrative demands a response; sometimes we hear, 'God why didn't you help my brother?' or 'why weren't you here?' or grief simply fills us up beyond our understanding with our own memories of loss and death. A confession of faith is made "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world", and Jesus weeps at both the death of his friend and the lack of understanding of what it means for him to say, "I am the Resurrection and the Life". Jesus asks the gathering crowd to roll away the stone from the tomb.

We hear Jesus' powerful words, "Come out" and "Unbind him and let him go," commanding disciples and neighbors alike to unwrap Lazarus from his grave cloths which still imprison him. Jesus demands their participation to set free the man who once was dead and still. Jesus engages us all in the lives our neighbors when he brings his friend back to life. We are reminded it is Lazarus' neighbors and disciples who unbind him from the tightly wrapped cloths which prevent him from reentering the world of the living. With Lazarus we see new life and the mystery of what that life means for us, and our friends and neighbors when we encounter Jesus. I invite you to pay attention to what is stirring in you as you listen to this passage and come to Jesus in prayer as you reflect on this passage.

In an extraordinary move, I would like to share new scholarship about this text that suggests that it is not two sisters that meet Jesus on the road as he comes to Bethany to meet Lazarus, but one sister of Lazarus, Mary. The research was done by Elizabeth Schrader; her heart was moved to study Mary Magalene, and she entered seminary to study. In seminary, Schrader wrote her dissertation on Mary Magdalene and used a recently digitized version of the Papyrus 66 from the year 200 AD. She noted that a scribe had changed some the words by over writing them and changing pronouns in this passage of awkwardly written in Greek. She also noted discrepancies and changes in mark overs on the handwritten text. It was not clear whether it the changes were to make it the Greek "flow better", to conflate the story of Mary and Martha from Luke for "clarity", or a misreading of the letters in the Greek text.



The original text does not say "Martha," beneath it, it said "Mary." Early church theologians (third century) only write about "Mary" regarding this text, not Martha, (who also could not have been the Martha from Mary and Martha in Luke—different people, different story, same name). It matters because it is Mary Magdalene who meets Jesus at the tomb; she is recognized as one of the women in all four Gospels at the resurrection and it seems that it was Mary, Mary Magdalene who recognized Jesus as the Messiah in a moment before the tomb of Lazarus in the Gospel of John.

The other observation Schrader made has to do with geography. Schrader suggested that Mary was not from Magdala, a place that seems not to have existed in the time of Jesus, but that she is from Bethany, Lazarus' sister and that the word *magdala* in Aramaic means tower. When Mary confesses Jesus as the Messiah, (in the text we know, Martha) Mary is given the title Mary the Tower, a parallel to Peter, the Rock in the other Gospels. Mary will be a witness to the Resurrection and a leader in the life of the early Church.

As witnesses to the power of the resurrection, we stand with Mary the Tower in our world now, today, as participants in the transformation of God's world. May we too be faithful.