

Isaiah 52:7-9

(NLT)

How beautiful on the mountains

are the feet of the messenger who brings good news,

the good news of peace and salvation,

the news that the God of Israel reigns!

The watchmen shout and sing with joy,

for before their very eyes

they see the Lord returning to Jerusalem.

Let the ruins of Jerusalem break into joyful song,

for the Lord has comforted his people.

He has redeemed Jerusalem.

O Love that will not let me go

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvA6PYa54sg>

Lyrics: <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/432>

Martha was a difficult woman to have as a sister. At least if you were like Mary. Martha seemed to just have a way of keeping it all together, keeping the household running, being a gracious and well organized host. She was a kind woman, for whom duty and responsibility came first and she often lost patience with her sister Mary, who seemed to lack discipline and patience for household tasks that really ought to be mastered by every respectable Jewish girl. Mary was passionate and bold and free spirited and curious and a little prone to distraction.

Mary sat on the rooftop daydreaming. She was excited to see her friends again, but the afternoon was dragging on and everytime Martha saw her, she got a new job to do. She snuck onto the roof for a little peace. For Martha's part, sometimes it was easier to do it herself than teach Mary how to do it right, so she was pretending not to notice for now. Mary smiled, remembering the first time Jesus had come to her house. She'd been so fascinated

with this man, so captivated that she quite forgot there were chores she was supposed to be doing. She could have stayed all day to listen to him and not notice time passing at all. Till Martha loudly complained it was unfair she had to do all the work. Mary's cheeks had burned with shame. Of course she should have been helping. Hosting guests meant extra work. But Jesus didn't seem to notice her sudden discomfort. He'd given her a gentle knowing smile. He'd even defended her to Martha, that didn't happen much. Usually the village folk would shake their heads and wonder that she wasn't more like her sister. She'd tried, she really had, but she could never seem to measure up, especially when Martha was the comparison. She would give anything to be sitting at his feet once more, just listening to him telling stories, and talking about God. He'd not only defended her and given her permission to be there, he'd told Martha that she, Mary, was doing the right thing. It was the first time in a long time she could remember feeling like she was enough, like someone saw her for who she was and loved her anyway, not loved what they wanted her to be. And since then, she took any opportunity she could to be near him.

Nearer my God to thee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gosY-UrpHcA>

Psalm 27

Mary blinked. The afternoon was wearing on, there was only so long she could get away with being on the roof, before Martha would get impatient. She grabbed some clothes that had been drying up there and carried them down, hoping it would make it seem like she had been meaningfully occupied. Martha wasn't fooled, but she had too much to do to worry about her sister right now. Nevertheless, she assigned Mary a job on the way by, and Mary hurried out to borrow the items she needed, eager to not have Martha lose patience with her, not tonight. They were having a dinner in honour of Jesus, and she was hoping Martha would be in a lenient mood and overlook her just wanting to listen to Jesus.

She skipped along the road their house was on. In the distance she could see the hill where her brother Lazarus had been buried. Had. He was alive now. It was complicated. She could still feel the aching of the grief in her bones, even though he was back, it doesn't just go away. She was grateful for every moment she had with him, but her feelings were so all over the place. She had been so angry at Jesus. Jesus could have healed him, but he didn't even bother to come. He could heal so many other sick people, why not her brother. She felt abandoned when she needed him the most. And then he turned up four days too late, and she couldn't bring herself to go and meet him. She just wanted to be alone in her grief. Martha had, like always, put hospitality and the right thing first and gone out to meet him. It didn't take long for Martha to come back. "The Teacher is here and is asking for you". A gentle smile had played at Martha's lips, even through her misty eyes. Normal Rabbis didn't teach women as a rule, and much as she was trying to be the responsible one, she'd often thought about Jesus encouraging Mary's interest and Teacher was a term she used with

affection and a gentle nod to Mary that Martha was still learning too. Mary was still heartbroken and angry and confused, but she couldn't resist Jesus, upset at him as she was. When she reached him, she had fallen to his feet in tears. Lord if you'd been here, my brother would not have died. He was the only one who had really seen her but right now it felt like he was blind to her grief. She had dared to glance up at him, expecting some wisdom on the ways of God, something that would bring her comfort, some word of reassurance. Instead there were tears in his eyes, and he sat down and cried with her. Together they had walked to the tomb, and... Her mind still struggled to really understand what happened. Jesus had never given her answers, just shown her that sometimes love was surprising and extravagant, and that she could let go and trust him, even if it didn't always make sense.

Better than I

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6vGXtELwMUA>

Lyrics: <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/joywilliams/betterthani.html>

The dinner was going okay so far. She had been trying to attentively help Martha, and Martha had in turn been considerate in letting her linger nearby and listen. The main part of the meal was done, and they were reclining at the table and talking. She looked at the faces of the men in front of her. Her brother was laughing, it felt so good to hear him laugh, after she thought she might never again. Simon the Leper was hosting. At least he used to have leprosy. Also thanks to Jesus, he didn't anymore, but somehow the Leper was still how he was identified, he didn't go back to just being Simon, it was part of his story. I was broken, now I am whole.

She thought about what Jesus had given her, about what he had done for her. A flood of emotions washed over her as she remembered, and she wished she could show Jesus what he meant to her. How she could respond to being loved greatly, to being forgiven much. She had an idea. A crazy idea. It was probably stupid, Martha would be so embarrassed, people would talk- but even as she was thinking that, she was on her way to get it.

With trembling hands, she held the alabaster jar. Already a few of the disciples had noticed her standing there, but as soon as she opened it, everyone knew she was there. There is something about perfume that cannot be hidden. You could see a couple of the disciples doing mental sums about how much that little bottle was worth. Peter looked bewildered, it seemed like such a waste, it made no sense, why would she do this just out of the blue?

Matthew 26: 8-13

(NLT)

8 The disciples were indignant when they saw this. "What a waste!" they said. 9 "It could have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor."

10 But Jesus, aware of this, replied, "Why criticize this woman for doing such a good thing to me? 11 You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me. 12 She has poured this perfume on me to prepare my body for burial. 13 I tell you the truth, wherever the Good News is preached throughout the world, this woman's deed will be remembered and discussed."

It was almost embarrassing, and no one really knew how to react or respond. Mary felt self-conscious, but she remembered all the other times she had felt this shame and judgement, she remembered all the other times she'd been socially awkward and done things that girls weren't supposed to do, and behaved in ways that others couldn't comprehend. But most of all, she remembered the kindness in Jesus' eyes when he welcomed her and loved her exactly as she was. Broken and awkward and feeling small.

Alabaster Box

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5k9YZv9fzS8>

Lyrics: <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/cecewinans/alabasterbox.html>

Jesus looked at her tenderly, gazing into her eyes with love and gratitude. No one really understood what he was going through, what he knew was coming. And shining in the eyes of this dearly loved friend in front of him was love. Not love that wanted something out of him, not love that was by chance or a flight of fancy. A love that said I don't understand but I trust you. A love that was willing to put aside dignity, to risk shame and derision. A love that knew what it felt like to be loved and seen, that opened her eyes to see and love him in the same way. A costly love, the most valuable thing she had, poured out freely, not because he had asked it of her, not worrying whether she would have enough left if she gave this much, just because she wanted to bring him the best that she had. Even if she didn't fully understand just how much she had just done for him - the symbolism in her act of faith and what it meant to him, the comfort it brought him, and how it made him feel loved, when he was feeling fragile - he would always know. He moved over a little, and motioned to Peter to make room for her. There is no greater gift he could have given her, it was her favourite place to be. It had always been her favourite place to be.

Sitting at the feet of Jesus

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BT-3TSLRJ0>

Lyrics: <http://www.songlyrics.com/bill-gloria-gaither/sitting-at-the-feet-of-jesus-lyrics/>

-Prayer-