

“Now when Martha heard that Jesus was coming near, she went to meet him.”

Doesn't that sound like Martha, our Martha? Always a step or more ahead of us in perception and a step ahead of us in action? “Now when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him.”

When Martha's family was considering the scripture lesson possibilities for today, Dan promptly chose this passage. “The Martha lesson,” he called it. Dan knew this lesson to ring true to his Martha, to ring true to our Martha.

I'll let you decide if THIS part rings also true to Martha M. Swearingen as it did for Martha, sister of Mary and Lazarus of Bethany in Palestine and close friend of Jesus. THAT Martha had a few things to say to Jesus. She went out to meet Jesus to give him a piece of her mind. “Lord, if you had been here,” the biblical Martha said, “My brother wouldn't have died.”

There you have it. Our biggest complaint with God. If WE were the Creator, instead of just the created, we wouldn't have created or allowed death, would we? You are the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of God, co-creator of all that is. Answer us THAT question-of-all-human-questions: “Why does death exist? And don't try to blame us, either!” even though we suspect in our heart-of-hearts that death is somehow our fault.

Martha didn't take that tactic, though, did she? Martha named her deep faith in Christ Jesus. She said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died.” Ain't that the truth! Martha knew—we all know—that an absence of God is required for death to occur. When you sit with someone who is dying, as our Martha's family did, you understand this reality: We hold onto our God-spark as long as we can, and then there's a moment when we give our God-spark back to God.

Lazarus had long ago given HIS God-spark back to God. He was four-days dead. “But I know that you can still heal him,” Martha told Jesus, “you are the Son of God.”

Do you know that all the commentaries, at least the ones written by men although a fair number by women also, downplay this leap in insight on Martha's part? “She didn't REALLY or FULLY know who Jesus is,” they insist, or “Martha didn't REALLY or FULLY know what she was asking Jesus to do? How could she? Jesus hadn't ‘invented’ resurrection yet.”



I have a short answer for this: <P> “Doo. Doo.” Martha intuited the resurrection first, like she also intuited everything first—and correctly, also (just ask her family)!

This next part in the Lazarus story is crucial to our faith, even today. Jesus told Martha, “Your brother will rise again.” This means that YOU will rise again, and you and you and you and you and ... you get the idea; I will rise again.

Martha brushed Jesus' words aside. “I KNOW what the THEORY is, she said, I know what our faith teaches us about the ‘end time.’ We will all rise together on the ‘last day.’” If you are at all familiar with a certain end-time philosophy, popular even today in some Christian denominations, you will understand that Martha was referring to the predicted and expected end of all time when the world would come to an end upon Jesus' second coming to earth, whereupon [insert your particular apocalyptic beliefs here] and then all of creation would be made new, and all who have died will come back to life.

I'll tell you what Martha Swearingen thought about THOSE end-time theories. I asked her to use her great artistic abilities to make a sign for our Wednesday-morning Bible study we had at one time over yonder at the Skyline Starbucks. You know, a little sign that would invite people to join us. That little escapade almost got us kicked out of Starbucks. HERE's Martha's offering. In case you can't read her sign from where you sit, the sign says, “The world is NOT ending, ask us.” I'll tell you what got asked: The Starbucks manager promptly asked us to cease and desist with the sign or depart forever.

“Jesus said, ‘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. Do you believe this?’” Martha said to Jesus, both THAT Martha and the Martha who we each knew and loved, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

What shall we do with this knowledge today? The reality is that we KNOW with our brains that the world is not coming to an end, but we feel in our hearts as though our world already has ended, in a way. Martha's gone from us, gone with Christ Jesus to be with God our Father. While we can, in a sense, rejoice that Martha's faith has carried her home, we still grieve her loss.

But I tell you, we can hold on to Martha's faith. The world is NOT ending. It didn't end for Martha when she gave her God-spark left back to God. And in some way unimaginable to us, God took Martha home—changed from glory into glory, until **in heaven** WE take OUR place!

“Now when Martha heard that Jesus was coming near, she went to meet him.”

Someday, Jesus will come near for us, also.
