

Martha and Mary's cry for help echoes the psalmist's, "Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord" (Psalm 130:1). The "depths" refer to the depths of the sea, which in turn is an image of the realm of death. Out of the darkness of profound despair, in the lengthening shadows of death, Martha and Mary plea for help.

Waiting, waiting when every moment feels like a day, Martha and Mary's anxiety blooms as Jesus tarries. The story of Lazarus is a foreshadowing of the story of Jesus who cries out from the cross, "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" Jesus' cry for deliverance echoes in the silence of eternity.

With uncharacteristic insensitivity, Jesus delays going to Bethany until Lazarus has died and is buried. When Jesus arrives, Martha confronts him openly and even bitterly with her bewilderment and anger.

"Where were you when we needed you?" she asks! "If this is how you treat the people you love, the people who have housed you, feed you, companioned you through hard times, what kind of a friend are you?"

Jesus assures Martha her brother will rise again. Martha, like many a grief-stricken family member, says, "Yea, yea, I know in the sweet by and by, we shall meet on that beautiful shore." But if you had come when we called you, Lazarus, whom you claim to love, would still be with us now!

Jesus calls for Mary, who remains at home surrounded by mourners. When Mary heard Jesus was calling "she got up *quickly* and went to him." Mary repeats her sisters' pain-filled lament: "Sometimes you just don't come through. Do you need a woman to look after you?"

If John is right, if what we see when we see Jesus is God, then we may need to rethink our piety, especially as expressed in the depths of profound grief. Jesus does not become defensive, get angry, berate or chastise Martha and Mary for their "insolence." Jesus gives no sign that he expects them to relate to him as passive, obedient, little children.

Martha and Mary are Jesus' adult friends. Because they love him, they are not submissive or subservient. They are not the least afraid of him. They are not sullenly, silently angry with him. They do not accept what has happened as the will of God. They are bewildered and enraged and they tell him why.

In response to Mary's tears Jesus "groaned in his spirit and yielded himself to his turmoil" (Hart's translation).

Jesus asks to be taken to the tomb. He weeps. His tears are read as a sign of love. "When human hearts are breaking under sorrow's iron rod, then we find that selfsame aching deep within the heart of God."

When out of the depths you cry to God and all you hear is the echo of your own voice, confront the betrayer and rage against the injustice of abandonment. Rage against the pain of a heart broken and bleeding in the shadow of death. For this is the piety of Martha and Mary, a way to discover a God whose heart aches as yours.

There is one more cry in this story. Jesus stands before Lazarus' tomb, the stone rolled away, and cries with a *loud* voice. We are not awakened by a whisper. The tomb, by design, seals off the world of the dead from the world of the living.

The tomb is the ultimate and final security against the chaos of the world. We will not voluntarily leave our secure habitats; we must be startled out of them.

No one asked Lazarus if he wanted to return to life in Bethany, to yard work, to taxes, to the oppression of Caesar, to sleepless nights of anxiety, to the bitter-sweet realities of life, only to have to die again. Lazarus has no agency in this story. Lazarus' feelings, unlike his sisters', remain unexpressed.

It is quite possible we are more threatened by resurrection than by death. To dream awake, to keep watch asleep, to live while dying, to go on loving life from the depths of uncertainty and insecurity—who can endure?

The promise of the gospel, a promise foreshadowed in the raising of Lazarus, a promise made in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, is that across the threshold of death stands a friend. A friend who will, in a loud voice, call us by name. A friend who will give resurrection life to our mortal bodies through his Spirit that dwells in us.