**IF YOU HAD BEEN HERE #2 *MM online***

**Do you remember how, last week, we went to a graveside in Bethany and we heard the tearful cry of two sisters - Martha and Mary - as they each separately confronted Jesus with the same words - *If you had been here, my brother would not have died* *(Jn. 11:21, 32)*?I wonder *how* they said it? I’ve described them as “tearful” because they’d lost their beloved brother Lazarus (v. 17), so it’s a reasonable assumption, although grief takes many forms and passes through many stages as most of us know. One of the limitations of scripture is that we can’t *hear* the speakers and so we can’t *hear* how they speak. That’s why we’re all interpreters as we read the Bible – you may not consider yourself a Bible scholar, but you are because you are, by necessity, an *interpreter*!**

**For instance, take Jesus’ most famous words, the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew ch. 6 (vv. 9-13). How do you say it? I hope you don’t just parrot it quickly like I used to at school! Perhaps, if you’ve been isolated in lockdown since March and are aching for Christian fellowship (or any human company!), you may pray that opening word - *Our –* with special longing because it’s speaking of plurality - *OUR Father,* not just *MY Father.* And *Father –* won’t an orphan put an extra emphasis on that word? Most of us, despite our current difficulties, have got full bellies: don’t you think you’ll pray that petition for *daily bread* with less emphasis than the mother pleading with God while she’s looking at her hungry children? And what about when you ask for your trespasses to be forgiven? If that’s just a general prayer about sinfulness, it may simply roll off your tongue; but if you’re convicted by some particular guilt, don’t you think you’ll pray it very differently?**

**So how did Martha and Mary speak to Jesus when they both said, *If you had been here, my brother would not have died* in John ch. 11? Let’s investigate. Their brother, Lazarus, had fallen sick and the sisters sent a message to Jesus, who was on the other side of the Jordan (Jn. 10:40), saying, *the one you love is sick (11:3).* They clearly expected Him to come running, but He didn’t - He tarried another two days right where He was (v. 6), so that, by the time He arrived in Bethany, Lazarus was dead and buried four days (v. 17).**

**So, did He *really* love Lazarus? Yes – He called him His friend in v. 11; He wept at his graveside in v. 35, when people commented, *See how he loved him (v. 36)*; and John baldly confirms the fact in v. 5, stressing that He didn’t just love Lazarus – *Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus,* he says. Oh, yes, Jesus loved that whole family.**

**But He stayed where He was. Did Martha and Mary know that He deliberatel*y* delayed? I think so: *the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”***

***When he heard this* (so, presumably when the messenger was till there), *Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it (v. 4).”* Then John tells us of Jesus’ love for themand then he says, *Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days (v. 6).* I think it’s reasonable to assume that the messenger either returned with the news that Jesus had heard but wasn’t coming yet or sent such a message back. If you think that the sisters knew that Jesus had delayed, that will affect how you read their words to Him. You might say them angrily – *Lord, IF YOU HAD BEEN HERE, my brother would not have died!***

**You might take a clue from what the sisters *did.* When Jesus arrived, He didn’t enter the village at first (v. 30), so, when *Martha heard that He was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home (v. 20).* You see, like most sisters, they were similar, but very, very different! Do you remember the story that Luke told?**

**Lk. 10:38-42**

**In the story in John 11, Martha and Mary are acting entirely in character! If you had to predict which one of them would rush down the road and which would stay behind, on Luke’s evidence you’d know that Martha was the impulsive one and Mary the contemplative one. They both loved Jesus, but in their own ways.**

**Martha confronted Him and I think a reasonable interpretation would be that she spoke ANGRILY – *Lord, IF YOU HAD BEEN HERE, my brother would not have died!* Do you remember how Jesus addressed her anger if it was anger? First He spoke about her dear brother – *Your brother will rise again (v. 23)* and then He drew attention to Himself – *I am the resurrection and the life* – and then He gently challenged her – *Do you believe this (vv. 25-6)?***

**Take your anger to Jesus. He would rather have honest anger than repressed hypocrisy because He wants to deal with it. You won’t shock Him – He can see coming down the road! He’ll let you sound off and then He’ll take you to the heart of your anger. Why was she angry? Because she loved her dead brother so much! So He talked to her about him. Pour out your heart, but listen for His reply. Because He will then lead you to a great truth – He is the answer to whatever question you are posing! And, as that sinks in, He’ll challenge you to believe it. *Yes, Lord, [Martha] told him, I believe….(v. 27).* And there’s no way that *those* words in *that* context can be spoken in anger….**

**So now He sent her back to her sister: *After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you (v. 28)”.* Always remember that, as He deals with us, He wants us to help Him to deal with others.**

***When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him (v. 29). When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died (v. 32)”.* She’s on her knees – Mary isn’t angry, she’s broken. So how does Jesus deal with her? *When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked* and then He wept (vv. 33-5).**

**Take your tears to Jesus. You know what they said about Jesus, don’t you? *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out (Mt. 12:20).* He will sit weeping with you for as long as necessary. That’s as long as *necessary.* Because, eventually He will say, *Take away the stone (v. 39).* Now it’s time to deal with your grief which is like a stone in the way. Of course, it was Martha who objected, while Mary remained silent (v. 39)! Jesus told them that the time had come for faith in action – *if you believe….you [will] see the glory of God (v. 40),* He said, and *So they* [plural!] *took away the stone (v. 41)* and they saw the glory of God (v. 44).**

***If you had been here,* the sisters said*….*Remember, these were the days *before* Pentecost. Now, by the Spirit, He is always here – He will never leave us nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). Therefore, whatever we are facing, He is already on site to help us address it. And, usually, he will do that by helping us to address *ourselves* first!**