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Easter, Resurrection and Transformation

I hadn't really thought about it before, until an article in the current issue of *The Witness* – an Episcopal-related periodical addressing social issues from a faith perspective – pointed it out. Planted within the great drama of *The Raising of Lazarus* (John 11) is a wonderful subplot: “The Confession of Saint Martha.” Here is yet another reminder that transformation is at the heart of the Gospel.

You know the story. Lazarus, friend of Jesus and brother to Martha and Mary, has died and has been in the tomb for four days when Jesus finally arrives in Bethany. And, as John tells it (he's the only Gospel writer that does): “*When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.*”

Read that sentence again and you'll see that this is quite a role reversal for these two sisters. For in Luke's well-known story about the time Jesus came for a social visit with the sisters, it is Martha, not Mary, who stays at home – in the kitchen – where she dutifully fulfills all that's expected of her. Mary, however, breaks convention and braves Martha's complaints that she isn't pulling her weight domestically, and sits at Jesus feet.

But here, lost in the wonder Lazarus' death and resurrection, is a clue that this is a quite different Martha that the one who cooked for Jesus that day he came for lunch. For here Martha departs from the predictable—she leaves the women in their expected ritualized mourning and goes out to meet Jesus.

As soon as Jesus sets foot in town, Martha goes directly up to Jesus and confronts him there in the road: “*If you had been here, my brother would not have died.*” What courage! What faith! And then, in response to Jesus' question: “Do you believe?” we have her great affirmation, “*Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the One who is coming into the world.*” There you have it: “The Confession of Saint Martha.”

I wonder: did the same kind of transformation that turned Saul from the persecutor to Paul the evangelist—that turned Peter from the braggart who denied Jesus in the courtyard into the “rock” on which the church was founded—did that same power change Martha from a woman whining about needing help in the kitchen into a woman of great faith empowered to go out and ask for what she wanted and needed? Is John letting us in on the good news that Lazarus isn't the only one of the three famous siblings to experience new life?

That transformation that changed Martha and so many others is nothing less than the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit calling each and every one of us to wholeness and to our full potential as children of God and to the life abundant that is our inheritance.

It is a change that isn't about making us someone we're not but about making us more authentically who we are. The author of the *Witness* article, Susan Russell, says this change is best described for her in a song she learned at a women's retreat:

*I will change your name. You shall no longer be called
Wounded, Outcast, Lonely or Afraid.
I will change your name. Your new name shall be
Joyfulness, Confidence, Overcoming One,
Faithfulness, Friend of God, One who seeks my face.*

This is the abundant, resurrection life that God intends for each and every one of us: joyful in our work, confident in our gifts, secure in the love of the God who calls us to live not in the anxiety of earning approval but in the peace of knowing that we are both fully known and fully loved. And ready, like Martha, to march out on the dirt road outside of town, if we have to, in order to bring to Jesus' attention to that which needs fixing, healing, raising—in ourselves, in our families, in our church and in our world.

Happy Easter, everyone!