

God is still God

Ricarda Witcombe *reflects on* John 11:1-45

Today's Gospel passage is long and powerful. It brings us right into the heart of Passiontide at every level. There are many people and voices within it – one is Martha, a woman whom Jesus loved. She speaks here in the immediate moments after her beloved brother has died. She has longed for Jesus to come and make him well, but he hasn't. The worst has happened. When Jesus does arrive, Martha opens her heart to him. She gives him both her grief and her faith. For Martha the two things do not cancel each other out, but co-exist.

So often, we find our life experience too difficult to make faith seem possible. Martha shows us another way. She knows that, standing before her, despite what has happened, is the Lord of Heaven and Earth. God is still God. The path continues. In one hand she holds her life, with all its pain and bereavement, and in the other she holds her faith in God. In Martha we see a woman in the midst of grief, standing in a place of faith. Her statement in verse 27 is extraordinary. Church history being what it is, we have placed much more emphasis on Peter's declaration of faith in the Gospel. But Martha's is just as great, if not greater, especially given the experience that she speaks out of – I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who has come into the world. 🙏

Lord, I echo Martha's words. I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who has come into the world, and I give you my pain and my faith. Amen.

Walking with Rosie

Spring

by Gillian Cooper

The sun is shining for the first time in a while and the path around the recreation ground is finally free of mud. Rosie has been to the groomer and is feeling light and frisky this morning. Even her very old friend Archie is out of his buggy and trotting along with an occasional bounce and wiggle. It may rain again tomorrow, but

for the moment it is possible to believe that spring is really here, and there is hope of summer to come.

Easter is coming. Hope is in the air, and joy just around the corner. Soon the eternal drama of death and resurrection will be played out for us again. Hatred will once more be defeated by love, and death by life. And the vastness of God's love for us will be revealed anew, in the trauma of Good Friday and in the glory of a bright Easter dawn. 🙏

“Nothing great is ever achieved without much enduring.”

St Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), Italian mystic

Things you wished you knew about church history

Part 2 – the invention of the secular

by Stephen Backhouse

When Rome was sacked by the Germanic barbarian Alaric in AD 410, the event shocked pagans and Christians alike. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (in modern-day Algeria), wrote *City of God* in response to pagan criticism on the one hand and shaken Christian confidence on the other. In it he argues, among other things, that the success of the Heavenly City is independent of the fortunes of

the Earthly City. The magisterial work encompasses history, politics, ethics, theology and the philosophy of space and time. It is often considered to be second only to the Bible in terms of influence on the development of Christian civilisation. Its notion that all human institutions (including the Church) occupy the “secular” sphere, and that only God can determine membership of the “sacred”, has been as influential as it has been misunderstood in the history of Church and state relations. 🙏