

Mary, Martha and Lazarus – it's so good to hear those names together – a family unit with all the intimate negotiations that requires in order to succeed, the checks and balances of coping with a variety of characters expressing, if allowed, part of God's word to us all. And its success can be measured in the fact of Jesus's feeling at home with them, a people and a place where he could find friendship and succour – a place where God's love is already present, a place indeed where Jesus learns to love, learns in his turn to be an expression of God's love. He delays to come, for whatever reason, and both Martha and Mary dare to question him on this – a sign both of their love for Lazarus and for Jesus, that love which enables us to speak freely to one another knowing that even censure can be given and received without the original bond of love being broken, knowing indeed that Lazarus can be returned to this family in safety, can continue for a little while longer to know on earth the language of God's love, to be able to say:

*“We ourselves have known and put our faith in
God's love towards ourselves.
God is love
and anyone who lives in love lives in God
and God lives in [them].”*

- a variety of characters each expressing, if allowed, part of God's word to us all. 'if allowed', with the recent revelations of what was happening in the Jesus Army in mind – a Christian community which certainly provided meaning and succour to many but with an emphasis on conformity, correct expression and a God who punishes those who dare to differ; not a place in which Mary or Martha or Lazarus, or indeed Jesus, would have felt at home. It's a lesson for us all – how are we to one another?

Br John Mayhead
Monastery of Christ Our Saviour