

Daniela Lucia RAPISARDA

*Body, Mind and Tears:**When Jesus Meets me as a Whole*

A Pharisee invited Jesus to have dinner with him, and Jesus went to his house and sat down to eat. In that town was a woman who lived a sinful life. She heard that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's house, so she brought an alabaster jar full of perfume and stood behind Jesus, by his feet, crying and wetting his feet with her tears. Then she dried his feet with her hair, kissed them, and poured the perfume on them. When the Pharisee saw this, he said to himself "If this man really were a prophet, he would know who is this woman who is touching him; he would know what kind of sinful life she lives!"

Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to tell you" "Yes, Teacher," he said, "tell me." "There were two men who owed money to a moneylender," Jesus began. "One owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other owed him fifty. Neither of them could pay him back, so he cancelled the debts of both. Which one, then, will love him more?" "I suppose," answered Simon, "that it would be the one who was forgiven more." "You are right," said Jesus. Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your home, and you gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You did not welcome me with a kiss, but she has not stopped kissing my feet since I came. You provided no olive oil for my head, but she has covered my feet with perfume. I tell you, then, the great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven. But whoever has been forgiven little shows only a little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, "your sins are forgiven." The others sitting at the table began to say to themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" But Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7, 36-50)

A NIGHT DREAM

A room, the floor is in marble, black and white checks. Along one side of the room there is a bench. A woman is laying on that bench. It is impossible to say how old she is. She is worn-out by a life of hardship. She has black hair and very white skin. She must be homeless, possibly a drug-addict. I look at her: she gets whiter and whiter. She is almost ghost-like. She must have overdosed. I must do something to help her. I seize her and pull her to the centre of the room where there is a bucket full of water. I seize her head and pull it down, under the water. I can see her face, under the water, it goes whiter

and whiter. Then I take a scrub brush and begin brushing the floor with the woman's wet hair. Through this act of immersion, the woman comes back to life through a process of resurrection.

MY INTERPRETATION OF THE DREAM

1. The woman is homeless, an outcast. She is a stranger, like me, a stranger in Norway, a Sicilian in Europe, a woman in a man's world. She's addicted, like me, to my job, to people, to relationships.
2. The woman is in deep need: an overdose is killing her.
3. I dip her in water: water as tears, water as vital element, a source of life. Water regenerates, it brings life. It baptises. Water is an element of silence, the absence of sound, a place beyond pain, beyond tears. Lots of tears heal the pain.
4. I wash the floor with the woman's hair and with tears. There are many tears, enough to fill a bucket. Tears are poured over the Black and White floor tiles. Many tears wash the Black and White of the floor. Black and White, symbols of oppressive dualism: man and woman, spirit and matter, intellect and sensuality, culture and nature.
5. I pulled the woman to the centre of the room, to the centre of the stage. What are the implications of being "in the centre"? What is the right way to occupy the centre? To occupy the centre demands humbleness, voluntary humiliation. It means to serve.
6. The woman is resuscitated as her body is used to wash the floor. This same service that is often humiliating chores of women brings the woman back to life. The woman and the humble act of serving becomes a revitalising, regenerating experience. Women can, if they want, live out power as service.

**A "CLASSIC" INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLETEXT**

In a certain "classic" interpretation, this narrative of Luke is seen as depicting a case of "emotional extravagance." The interpreter explains, "the scene shows a bit of hysteria in a woman that seems to be unable to express intellectually her more or less clear understanding of herself." In a male world, the expression of emotions is perceived as weakness and lack of rationality. The open expression of strong emotions is dis-

missed as hysteria. Nowhere in the text is it said that the woman is a prostitute. Nevertheless, this is what she is in the common understanding. The scene is undoubtedly sensual and eases the equation: woman – sin – sex – Eve.

THE JUDGEMENT OF JESUS

Jesus meets the woman where she is. Humiliation, pain and expression of feelings are received, accepted, and welcomed by Jesus. Jesus recognises the emotional intelligence of the woman: where the Pharisees do not recognise the prophet, the woman recognises the Messiah. Jesus lets the woman touch and kiss him. He tells Simeon: “you have not kissed me.” Jesus recognises the value of physical contact, of the body, of the expression of feelings through the body. “Which one, then, will love him more?” In his parable Jesus acknowledges the great love of the woman and, later, her great faith.

WHY DO I ADMIRE THE WOMAN?

I admire the woman for her courage to enter a male environment knowing that she will be judged for what she is and for having dared to challenge the rules. This is a feeling that is experienced, at least to some extent, by all women who enter ministry or plan to do so. I admire her courage to humiliate herself, to prostrate herself, to cry and to express her pain in public. I salute her for her great love, devotion, generosity (she offers the best of her own resources), compassion, empathy, care, faith.

PRAYER

*Gracious God, You anoint our heads with oil
And wrap us in Your mantle of justice
You make us vessels of Your Spirit.
Grant that these bodies You have consecrated
May respond to You always
May we hear You in the cries of the needy
And touch You in the lives of the broken-hearted
As You have anointed us
So may we anoint You wherever we find You
On barren city streets, in hospices for the outcast
In the sanctuaries of our houses of worship.
Grant us the courage
To return in service what You have given us
Grant us the courage to pour out our gifts
Of service and beauty and compassion
Even when the indignant protest our very presence
Grant us the courage to go so far as to be shattered
If that is what is required
For the fragrance of Your realm to penetrate our world
For You, o God, are the potter; we are the clay.
We are the earthen vessels of Your Spirit
We are the alabaster jars You have made!*

I ADMIRE THEIR RELATIONSHIP

The love of Jesus and the love for Jesus proves itself stronger than fear. The woman shows the courage to touch Jesus and Jesus lets her touch him. Jesus accepts the woman in her emotionality and her body. Her many sins are forgiven, because she has loved much. Love produces forgiveness. But to whom little is forgiven, he loves little. Forgiveness generates love. Between Jesus and the woman a circle of love and forgiveness is established, it is almost contemporaneity, we could say: an interactive circle of love and forgiveness. The woman receives from Jesus salvation and peace–shalom–wholeness.

CONCLUSION


For the woman of great faith, crying, serving, humbling and prostrating herself (contact with Jesus and following Jesus) becomes an experience of healing, regeneration, and resurrection. Meeting Jesus makes my bodily and emotional nature worthy. I am able to see, understand, know and recognise with the whole of myself. The woman is received by Jesus and in Jesus finds forgiveness, salvation, and peace. The resurrection of Jesus is anticipated and followed by experiences of personal regeneration and resurrection.

Suggested Reading

SALLBERG KAM Rose, *Their Stories, Our Stories. Women of the Bible*. New York, 1995.
SCHMIDT Eva Renate – KORENHOF Mieke – JOST Renate (eds.), *Feministisch gelesen*. Zürich, 1989.
NEWSOM Carol A. – RINGE Sharon H. (eds.), *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Louisville, 1998.

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¹ SALLBERG KAM Rose, *Their Stories, Our Stories. Women of the Bible*. New York, 1995. 251.



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