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Jesus Spoke to Women

Lee Magness

This reading recalls several key interactions between Jesus and women in the Gospels, highlighting how the encounters gave the women recognition, respect, forgiveness, and—most of all— a voice. The reading can be performed by one reader or by a different reader for each section.

- 1 Jesus spoke to women,
like the bleeding woman,
retiring but resolved,
so deeply touched she dared to touch,
so poor she had nothing to lose,
so frustrated by failed promises and potions she had nothing left but faith.
Jesus spoke to her and said, “Who touched me?”—
a question not for the crowds but the cowering woman,
the unclean, outcast woman, wounded by her own womanhood,
faceless but not faithless, falling, fearful,
voiceless in the incredulous crowd until he spoke,
and she told him in trust her whole terrible truth.
Jesus spoke to her again and said,
“My daughter, your faith has made you well;
go in peace, and be healed of your disease”—
words of relationship, words of welcome, words of wellness,
words of peace, of shalom, of an end to dis-ease.
With his words he spoke wholeness to this woman.

Jesus spoke to women. (Mark 5.25–34)

- 2 Jesus spoke to women,
like the little girl,
lavishly loved,
well-fathered, well-familied,
wealthy but suddenly unwell,
once so lively but now barely alive.
Jesus spoke to her father, “Do not fear, only believe”—
her father flying through the scattering streets, to the shore unsure—
and to the widows wailing, “The child is not dead but sleeping,”
only to hear them laugh in his firm face,
but not a word to those who said, “Your daughter is dead,”
as if raising the dead was trouble for the teacher.

Then Jesus spoke to her and said,
 “Little girl, arise.
 Wouldn’t you like something to eat?”—
words of resurrection, words of restoration, words of simple renewal,
 words of concern not only for her aliveness but for her life.
With his words he spoke life to this young woman.
Jesus spoke to women. (Mark 5.21–24, 35–53)

3 Jesus spoke to women,
 like the woman caught in adultery,
 standing, stunned, about to be stoned,
caught in the very act, in the very fact of her self-disrespect,
 caught in the sight of the blind guides,
 in her blatant reflection of their own unseen sins.
Jesus drew in the dust, fingering her sin, and said,
 “Let anyone without sin throw the first stone.”
 Then he drew in the dirt again, fingering their sins, divulging,
 “You are not the only sinner standing here today!”
 She watched them slip away, one by one, wisest to the witless,
 until she was the only sinner standing before the crouching Jesus.
Jesus spoke to her and said, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”
She heard, “Sinners must not commend sinners but neither do they condemn.”
 Then “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way and sin no more”—
words of mercy, words of grace, words of forgiveness,
 words of accountability, of responsibility, of direction.
With his words he spoke forgiveness to this woman.
Jesus spoke to women. (John 7.53–8.11)

4 Jesus spoke to women,
 like the unlike sisters,
 one holding Jesus so high she could not escape the kitchen,
the other holding Jesus so high she could not escape his side,
 both in love with their Lord,
 each separated by the same obsession.
Jesus spoke to Martha and said,
 “Martha, Martha, you are distracted by many things; only one thing is needful”
 (lovingly calling her name and correcting her faulty focus);
 “Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her,”
 reminding her that he had called women not just to feed but to follow,
 that she should never shame her sister for her study.
Jesus’ words were also meant for Mary:
 “You too should beware distractions:
 sometimes study distracts from service.”
 “You do well to feed your soul, imbibing my presence.”
 “You must not let anyone discourage your service to me.”
With his words he spoke affirmation to these women.
Jesus spoke to women. (Luke 10.38–42)

5 Jesus spoke to women,
 like the bold woman,
 who did the jarring thing everyone questioned but none would forget—
 Where did she get the money to buy an alabaster jar?
 How was she so well-oiled as to fill it with rich ointment?
 How dare she make her way to where men went, do what men did—anoint?
 Jesus spoke to Simon, his host, and to the disciples, his helpers,
 but with words the woman would have heard most clearly.
 “Why do you trouble the woman? She has done me a good service”
 sounded like “I honor your ministry, in spite of the foes you face.”
 “By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial” said to her,
 “You make sense of my Messiahship, understand my undertaking.”
 Jesus spoke to her as it were and said,
 “Your good deed merges with my good news, your anointing with atonement.
 When people gather in remembrance of me, they will remember you”—
 words of recognition for her recognition, words of regard for her regard,
 words of remembrance for her remembrance.
 With his words he spoke respect to this woman.
 Jesus spoke to women. (Mark 14.3–9)

6 Jesus spoke to women,
 like the weeping woman,
 stumbling while it was still dark to the tomb,
 wondering who would, who had, rolled away the stone,
 almost spilling the spices when she heard the dazzling voices say,
 “He has risen,” the terrifying truth the others refused to take in.
 Jesus spoke to her and said,
 “Why are you weeping?”—sympathizing with but questioning her sorrow.
 Then “Whom are you looking for?”—affirming but adjusting her focus.
 Then “Mary!” Now able to call his name, “Rabbi,” only when he called hers.
 And then “Quit holding on to me”—
 there’s work for me, for us, to do before I ascend to my father.
 Finally Jesus spoke to her and said,
 “But go to my brothers and tell them I am ascending,”
 his voice giving her a voice,
 his resurrected words gave her resurrection words—
 the first to see, the first to hear, the first to say, “I have seen the Lord.”
 With his words he spoke proclamation to this woman.
 Jesus spoke to women. (John 20.1–18)

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