

## In Memory of Her: A Missing Ritual

In her book *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza discusses how the unnamed woman was depicted as a prophet by anointing Jesus' head, and how Luke's redaction takes that possibility off the table as well as the phrase "in remembrance of her." Schüssler Fiorenza explains:

"In the discipleship of equals the 'role' of women is not peripheral or trivial, but at the center, and thus of utmost importance to the praxis of 'solidarity from below.' The story of the anointing of Jesus by a woman articulates this insight. In its final form it is told by a community that already envisions a world-wide mission: wherever the gospel – the good news of the *basileia* – is announced, in the whole wide world, the praxis of this woman will be remembered." (152)

Schüssler Fiorenza continues:

"Although the eucharistic formula 'in remembrance of me' (1 Cor 11:24, 25) is verbally similar to the gospel proclamation 'in remembrance of her,' the later church has not ritualized this story of the woman prophet, using it instead to assert as God's will that poverty cannot be eliminated. The 'church of the poor' and the 'church of women' must be recovered at the same time, if 'solidarity from below' is to become a reality for the whole community of Jesus again." (153)

What if the story of this woman had been ritualized? Reflecting on this possibility I offer these proposals:

1 Possible Structure: (Based on Luke 7:36-50) Eucharist; Hospitality Ritual; Charge to the People; Blessing

The minister says:

While Jesus was at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of ointment, [pouring water] and she washed Jesus' feet with her tears and [drying his/her hands] dried them with her hair. [Opening the jar of ointment] She kissed Jesus' feet and anointed them with ointment. She showed great love. She taught us to love generously; to show kindness whenever we can; to love the way Jesus taught us when he said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

And accepting her acts of love and hospitality, Jesus said,

"Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her." (Mark 14:9)

[The people may be invited to anoint one another with ointment.]

2 Possible Structure: (Based on Mark 14) Sermon; Love Ritual; Eucharist

The minister says:

While Jesus was at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, [Opening the jar of ointment] and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. She showed us to love generously; to show kindness whenever we can; to love the way Jesus taught us when he said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

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