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Congregation Kol Ami

Women of the Jewish and Christian Bible: A Four Session Series

Session IV: Women as Disciples – Mary Magdalene, Sisters Mary and Martha

“[Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve [disciples] were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out [and several others] who provided for them [or according to some ancient authorities, him] out of their resources.” (Gospel of Luke 8:2-3)

“[When Jesus was crucified], there were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee. . . . [After Joseph of Arimathea took Jesus down from the cross and wrapped the body in linen] he laid in in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid. When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him.[They went back to the tomb early in the morning on the first day of the week and the stone was rolled back. A young man dressed in a white robe appeared to them and told them not to be afraid; that Jesus was raised and that they should tell the disciples. But they were and said nothing to anyone] Now after he [Jesus] rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.” (Gospel of Mark 15:40-16:11).

“[When Jesus was crucified] many women were also there [in addition to his disciples], looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. . . . The next day. . . after the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. . . . The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised. . . . Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead’ and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him. This is my message for you. So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, ‘Greetings!’ And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be

afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.” (Gospel of Matthew, 27:55-28:10)

“Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’ [Simon Peter and the beloved disciple ran to the tomb. They saw the linen wrappings inside the tomb and believed that Jesus had been raised. They then returned to their homes]. But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they had laid him.’ When she had said this, she turned around, and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabboni!’ (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.” (Gospel of John 20:1-18)

“one of the Pharisees [in Capernaum] asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and took his place at the table. And a woman in the city, who was a singer, having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment [or perfume]. She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. . . [Jesus] said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ . . . And he said to the woman, Your faith has saved you; go in peace.” (Luke 7:36-50)

“[After Jesus said good-bye to his disciples, prepared to die], they were distressed and wept greatly. How are we going to go out to the rest of the world to announce the good news about the Realm of the child of true Humanity?” they said. ‘If they did not spare him, how will they spare us?’ Then Mary stood up. She greeted them all, addressing her brothers and sisters, ‘Do not weep and be distressed nor let your hearts be irresolute. For his grace will be with you all and will shelter you. Rather we should praise his greatness, for he has prepared us and made us true Human beings.’ When Mary had said these things, she turned their heart [to]ward the Good, and they began to debate about the words of [the Savior]. Peter said to Mary, ‘Sister, we know that the Savior loved you more than all other women. Tell us the words of the Savior that you remember, the things which you know that we don’t because we haven’t heard them.’ Mary responded, ‘I will teach you about what is hidden from you.’ And she began to speak these words to them. She said, ‘I saw the Lord in a vision, and I said to him, ‘Lord, I saw you today in a vision.’ He answered me, ‘How wonderful you are for not wavering at seeing me! For where the mind is, there is the treasure. . . . Andrew responded, addressing the brothers and sisters, ‘Say what you will about the things she has said, but I do not believe that the S[a]vior said these things, f[or] indeed these teachings are strange ideas.’ Peter responded, bringing up similar

concerns. He questioned them about the Savior: ‘Did he, then, speak with a woman in private without our knowing about it? Are we to turn around and listen to her? Did he choose her over us?’ Then [M]ary wept and said to Peter, ‘My brother Peter, what are you imagining? Do you think that I have thought up these things by myself in my heart or that I am telling lies about the Savior?’ Levi answered, speaking to Peter, ‘Peter, who have always been a wrathful person. Now I see you contending against the woman like the Adversaries. For if the Savior made her worthy, who are you then for you part to reject her? Assuredly the Savior’s knowledge of her is completely reliable. That is why he loved her more than us.’” (The Gospel According to Mary, Papyrus Berolinensis 8502.1, 5:1-10:10)

“[Jesus] entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.’ But the Lord answered her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.’” (Luke 10:38-42)

“[According to Protestant interpreters of Luke 10:38-42], Jesus defends Mary’s right to learn from Him [sic] and says this is the crucial thing for those who wish to serve Him [sic]. Jesus makes clear that for women as well as men one’s primary task is to be a disciple; only in that context can one be a proper hostess. Apologetic feminist interpretations in turn continue this dualistic interpretation. They focus on Mary’s rejection of the traditional housewife role and stress her option for theology. . . . Mary is compared to a student or disciple of a rabbi since she is seated at Jesus’ feet. . . . However, this interpretation highlights Christian women’s role as disciples at the expense of Jewish women and their tradition. It assumes that Jewish women were relegated to the kitchen and excluded from the study of the Torah. Apologetic feminist interpretations have not invented such an anti-Jewish explanation; rather, they have uncritically taken it over from malestream exegesis. They do so in order to show that Christianity, far from being anti-women, has actually liberated women. . . . [This anti-Jewish interpretation, however] overlooks that both Mary and Martha are Jewish women. . . . [Perhaps] Luke 10:38-42 was generated by and addressed to a situation in the life of the early church – rather than an episode in the life of Jesus. [This] is linguistically signaled by the title *Kyrios* [Lord]. The text appeals not to the authority of the historical Jesus but to that of the resurrected Lord. . . . It is important to note that the text itself does not directly place Martha in the kitchen preparing and serving a meal. In fact, the text merely states that she is preoccupied with too much ‘serving.’ *Diakonia* [ministry] and *diakonein* had already become technical terms for ecclesial leadership in Luke’s time. Traveling missionaries and house-churches were central to the early Christian mission, which depended on special mobility and hospitality. According to the Pauline literature, women as well as men were traveling space both for the preaching of the word and for eucharistic meal celebrations. . . . In early Christian usage, *diakonia* refers to eucharistic table service in the house-church. It was not, however, restricted to such service, since it also included the proclamation of the word. . . . Luke 10:38-42 stresses that the *diakonia* of Martha is not the ‘one thing needful’ and hence must be subordinated to ‘listening to the word.’ However, it must not be overlooked that the ‘good portion’ chosen by Mary is not the *diakonia* of the word. The characterization of Mary as a listening disciple corresponds to the narrative’s interests in playing

down the leadership role of women. . . . The rhetorical construction of Luke 10:38-42 pits the apostolic women of the Jesus movement against each other and appeals to a revelatory word of the resurrected Lord in order to restrict women's ministry and authority. . . . The rhetorical interests of the Lukan text are to silence women leaders of house-churches who, like Martha, might have protested, and to simultaneously extol Mary's 'silent' and subordinate behavior." (Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation*, 1992, pp. 59-68)