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Friday - Sunday

by Jonathan Lipps

FRIDAY

At first, I could handle the parlor tricks and the mysterious (obviously inane) babble. I could even deal with his useless confrontational attitude toward the other teachers. After all, you know there's no love lost between you Pharisees and anyone but yourselves... And I guess you could say I allowed myself some smiles at the expense of those who looked like fools after trying to trap him in his own words. You have to give him that much: he had a knack for confusing and disorienting his opponents in public, much to the people's delight. Ah, but the people! You know how they are—they'll clap and cheer at any oddity. Doesn't he know that's what he is to them? Just a curiosity! A curiosity, nonetheless, that manages to pull food out of thin air. I still haven't figured out how he did that one. I don't wonder if there weren't people planted in the crowd with food stashed away under certain rocks—that might have done the trick.

But what have years of wandering around the sewer districts of insignificant villages in Samaria, producing food from God-knows-where and "healing" people got him? (It's very easy to be "blind," by the way. I could do it myself. I wonder if Jesus would pay me as much as he paid his plants). The applause of rabble, that's what! And then later, their sticks and stones, because of that repugnant habit of his: quoting irrelevant passages from the Law and the Prophets at the wrong times. Not only did he pick the wrong kind of followers, he turned them on himself! If anything is a miracle, it's that he's still alive...

...Or maybe it's that I'm still around. At first, things were going smoothly. He wasn't as prone to doing so many damn rashful things. I smelled promise. And my companions weren't so thick-headed. But he kept saying incomprehensible shit, and that gradually addled their brains. You'd never have thought so many fishermen could become so many useless mystics in such a short time! Particularly

that Simon: going around, calling Jesus the Anointed. Anointed, of all things! *I'd* make a better Anointed than that carpenter. Of course, Jesus encouraged it, arrogant as he is, and "rewarded" Simon by calling him Peter. Ha! I'm sure "Peter" will get his fill of rocks when the people drag him to the gates and stone him for calling a carpenter the Anointed. What will he think of his reward then? It will take much less than the gates of Hades to overcome that simpleton, and I hope I'm there when it happens.

Of course, as the only "disciple" with his head on straight, I was given charge of the money bags. This, you see, is primarily why I stuck around and disgraced myself with Jesus and his lot. For whatever reason, people opened their purses to us whenever he came by. In hopes of "healing" or some unimportant favor, no doubt (and he never tired of granting the most insignificant things to the most insignificant people! It was insufferable, not to mention a waste of time). This was especially the way of things after news about Lazarus got out—Lazarus, by the way, perplexes me. He never struck me as the kind who would pretend to die so Jesus could "resurrect" him. In any case, it usually happened that even after feeding ourselves and that wretched gaggle of hangers-on (whores, to a one), there was a good deal of silver left over.

I kept faithful watch over the money, taking some for myself only as my services warranted, but I knew the other disciples were jealous of my position and probably tattled lies to Jesus about my use of the funds. No matter. I could deal with those fools. but I couldn't deal with Jesus when popularity turned against him and the money stopped coming in. I knew then that I had to leave the crazy charlatan behind before he dragged me into the mess he'd prepared for us ("If it were not so, I would have told you"!). The night that I made the decision was the night one of his prostitutes poured an entire jar of *myros nardos* on his feet! That jar could have fed us richly for months, but he just sat there with a sad smile on his face (why, I'll never know—I can't fathom what goes on in his diseased mind) and let her do it. Mary—that was her name, and not a bad-looking girl. I wouldn't have minded meeting her in her whoring days (I know your types disapprove, but the bonds of business are stronger than

those of moral approbation, eh?). I complained, of course, but he responded with more of that nonsense that I can't even remember.

So, here I am. You want Jesus and I want money. I think we can come to some sort of agreement. But remember, we're not talking bronze here: I'll have to go into hiding or those big brutes of fishermen will come after me after they've got over the fact that their "Anointed" is gone forever. I want silver. Thirty pieces, and no less. Well? Do we have a deal?

SUNDAY

And so, blood pounded in my ears and my feet pounded the path back into the city, but I was deaf to the cries of my body to stop, my face tear-streaked and wild-eyed, mouth agape in vain effort to stop the burning in my lungs: but it was the burning in my heart that blinded and bemuted me. I wanted it to burst so that I could die. I felt like I was going to die every time I thought of what happened. "And I will die," I thought, "Just as soon as I tell the disciples. I will not live in this world anymore that betrays and deceives and tears to pieces every holy thing. I will not live in this world that takes the best of all men and exults in his slaughter! I will not live in this world that destroys the one thing in it that ever gave me real love. I *cannot* live without that love!"

"And is there no end to the darkness?" I screamed inwardly as I continued to run, the crazed and adrenaline-pumped energies coalescing into a huge pit of dread in my center. A dread I hadn't felt since I knew my lord. Fuck! Frustration. Anger. "Judas was not enough. His eyes were not enough that never stopped roving where they should not. His stealing hands were not enough that harmed the poor we were trying to help. And of course his betrayal was not enough! Neither was the sin of the priests so high that it could not be topped, even in executing my lord—for now the most base deed has been done. They have taken my lord, and I do not know where they have put him!"

These were my thoughts as I ran, still—as always—not

comprehending the truth. And these were the words that fell in shattered pieces out of my mouth, between gasps, to Peter and John, when I arrived at the place where they were hiding. When they realized what I was saying and believed that because of my obvious exertions it must be the truth, their already-drawn faces fell all the more, but in Peter's eyes I saw a spark of defiance and anger. Immediately he thrust me, not unkindly, out of the doorway, and began running. John saw that I got some water and then was off like a shot after Peter, quickly catching up and overtaking him even while I could still see them.

I fell to the ground then and contemplated how I would die. Later it surprised me when I became aware that this was the lowest point of my life—where my heart passed closest to what it must feel like to be in Sheol. My lord was now not just dead, but *gone*, forever unreachable except in blurry memory. Then in utter desolation it occurred to me to go back to the tomb and commit suicide there, in the last place I had seen my lord. I recalled how I had dropped the burial spices at the tomb to run the more quickly, and thought that if I ingested these I would die.

With this hint of grim purpose all the pain in my side from running subsided, and my mind grew deathly calm. I trotted back to the tomb fancying that Samson must have felt much the same with his hands on the pillars at his sides. I hated that, unlike Samson, my death would not cause the thieves of my lord's body to be crushed and destroyed.

When I reached the tomb, John was outside with tears still on his face, but looking more thoughtful than anything else. At that time Peter strode out of the cave with fury and murder written in his eyes. I saw his hands shaking, and I knew that, had the thieves been there, those powerful hands of Peter's would have struck down any number of the villains. He glanced at me and then left, intent on doing I know not what. John left shortly thereafter by another route, leaving me alone with the jars of spices, the gaping tomb, and my dark plan.

It was then that I became aware of another person in the area. I turned around and saw an unfamiliar man, who I assumed had been hiding nearby while Peter and John were examining the tomb. My first reaction was an anger that surprised me—I felt that this person, whom I thought to be the gardener because of his clothes, was symbolic of all those in Jerusalem who had, in one moment, crowned my lord the “King of Kings”, and in the next laughed and jeered as he was lashed. But before I had even a chance to give vent to this anger, a huge wave of shame came unbidden and pierced my heart, as something—I know not what—reminded me of my plan to die here. The smooth stone of the jar that I had picked up seconds before now felt heavy and scalding like heated metal. I dropped it to the ground and my own scalding tears joined it, mixing with the embalming fluids that pooled on the dirt. It reminded me of the many pools of my lord’s blood that I had seen, and I could not bear it.

With the intrusion of the unknown man and the inescapable weight of shame, all the stoic, self-destructive purpose that was driving me disappeared, and pain and grief once again flooded into my body. The presence of the man made my shame all the greater, and my eyes were downcast. He had made me feel self-conscious—had made me *feel*, when all I wanted to do was die. Then he spoke.

"Woman," he said, "Why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Anger rose again as I saw that his words proved he must have been eavesdropping on Peter and John, but I had no strength to display it. Instead, my voice came weak and small, and I hated it. "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him," I whimpered, not daring to look up, and feeling nauseous.

"Mary."

The voice came like a knife to my heart and a splinter of light to my benighted mind. Not daring to look up, I froze as a rush of images and memories joined the reverberations of the voice in piercing my insides. I felt that a thousand needles were running to and fro inside

my body, and above all, a massive fear shadowed my mind...the fear that I would raise my eyes and see just the gardener, or worse: nothing at all. I had thought it could not get any worse, and now I was being taunted by the very voice of my lord!

And yet...and yet the addicting gentleness of the voice still called to me long after the echoes had died down, insistently but not urgently, as if the speaker had all the time in the world. In that instant I knew that my mind, in all its delusion, could never manufacture or reproduce such a sound—a sound of command, yet also of patience, grace, and love. With that realization hope exploded throughout my body and I trembled with the warmth of it—so different than the heat of shame. It grew until it would no longer be refused, and I turned my eyes from the broken jar at my feet (the very instrument of my death) upwards in glorious surrender to that hope, not quite daring to believe what would meet my eyes.

"Rabboni!" I cried, recognizing Jesus at last, and with that cry the world exulted. I *felt* in that moment as I have never felt before, and I knew that the greatest secret, the greatest surprise, the very *telos* of the universe had just called my name. *My name!* I was suddenly aware that every blade of grass—not just here but everywhere, every grain of sand, every tree, every mountain, and yes, every hollow cave, had been dying with me, and was now full to the overflowing with joy because *death* itself had been defeated! Death died and I was the first to know. I, the most humble of people, a woman and a prostitute, had witnessed the unveiling of the purpose of humanity and of existence. And I knew that god *delighted* in making his mystery known first to a broken and suicidal prostitute. At that time I was the world being made whole, and nothing before or after ever felt so right, or so deep.

Though truly, I had never felt more embarrassment and shame than in that moment. I had never before been so unaware and disgusted at my failings—at my body and the tears and the sadistic whispers that occupied my mind. But it did not matter. It did not affect me, because it was covered over with acceptance. I saw that, one day, as in this instant, I would be able to be naked *without* shame, as even Adam

and Eve were unable to be for long. I saw that I would transcend my ancestors and I knew it, because of the living proof in front of me.

And now, though that proof is gone and taken into heaven, I know it will not be long. I can feel the transformation will take place soon, and my body trembles at the very imagining of it. I can no longer hear the voice that opened my understanding for the first time, and that called my name—that spoke inside the walls of my own house! Nay, too many years have gone by and that memory has faded with all the others. Joyfully, it no longer worries me, because the image of his love is burned onto my scarred heart, just as the image of the sun is burned into our eyes if we look at it, but everlasting.

And know this, child (for though you are grown, you are still a child to me): if Jesus of Nazareth chooses to save me, whom they call Mary Magdalene, the lowest of all the women in Judea, he will without a doubt open his love even unto you, and to any who asks it of him...

Therefore, child, ask!

About The Author

Jonathan Lipps is a recent graduate of Stanford University with his B.A. and M.A. in Philosophy.