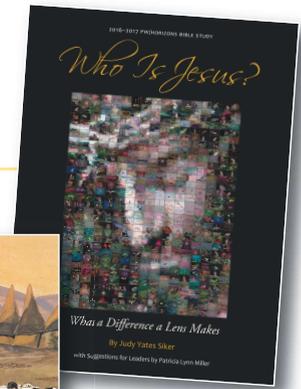
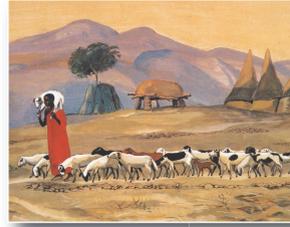


The Flesh and the Spirit, Whole

BY KATIE MULLIGAN

For use with Lesson Four of the 2016–2017 PW/*Horizons* Bible study, *Who Is Jesus? What a Difference a Lens Makes* by Judy Yates Siker



Scripture: John 9:1–7

“Jesus said, ‘As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes”

It was during my first pregnancy when I realized I had split my body from my spirit. I had done it so long ago, I almost didn’t remember. But there was something about the movement of that first baby in my womb that brought me back into myself. My whole self, including my experience of being sexually assaulted.

“Come sit on my lap,” the uncle had said. At six, I was so young, so ignorant, so . . . little. I walked home from the relative’s house, crying, frightened, angry, confused, barely seeing anything.

And then, suddenly, I stood very still. A place in my mind opened like the door to a secret room. I crawled in, closed the door, and I thought to myself, “I can think!” I stayed in that place a long time. Days, weeks, months, years. It was how I navigated my dangerous waters. There were other assaults, other injuries. I survived the way so many women and girls do—silently. For years, there was the room in my head and there was my body; they were separate.

But my first pregnancy made it impossible to continue that separation. My child pressed hard against my ribs. It was impossible to ignore. The nausea that lasted for months. The shifting of

my ligaments. In utero hiccups. The swelling of my breasts. The weight gain. Slowly this child called my soul back out of that secret room and into my body to feel the entirety of what was happening. Spirit and flesh reconciled uneasily.

Who is this Jesus who was embodied in the flesh of a child, a human being? Who is this Jesus who was also Spirit? Who is this Jesus who will not be reduced to one or the other, who claims to be the light of the world and then heals with a mixture of spit and dirt?

It was just the beginning. Spirit and flesh are an uneasy mix. I birthed that child and another. I nursed them, bathed them, sang to them. They called me back to life, those children. And all the while I prayed. In the dead of night, when the children were hungry, and all was quiet except my soul, I talked to God. It was fleshy, full of spirit, emotional, exhausting. It was reconciliation.

Our Savior was flesh and Spirit. Jesus calls us to follow after him in that reconciliation. The world calls and the Spirit calls and we are not free to ignore either. In our bodies and souls the two come together—messy, inconvenient, irrational. But we are made whole by the God who insists on wholeness even for God’s own self.

In the search for healing, I read a lot. I go back to this paragraph often, and offer it to you in closing: “There can be no sanitation here, or something of the divine essence will be lost—it

is not the genetically modified, metaphysical Son of God that declares the divine–human conjunction, but the screaming baby . . . covered in his birthing blood and received into the uncertain arms of his child/mother, who declares salvation for all. Male theologians have preferred

to distance themselves from these all too earthy moments and in doing so have missed the point—the divine is earthy, messy and partial and is to be found there in all its glory, not in splendid doctrine stripped of all humanness.”*

Questions

1. Is there a split for you between body and spirit? If so, where did it begin?
2. How does your understanding of body and spirit shape your understanding of who Jesus is?
3. What is the healing (of spirit and/or body) that Jesus is calling you to?

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Note

*Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, eds., *The Sexual Theologian: Essays On Sex, God and Politics* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 7.