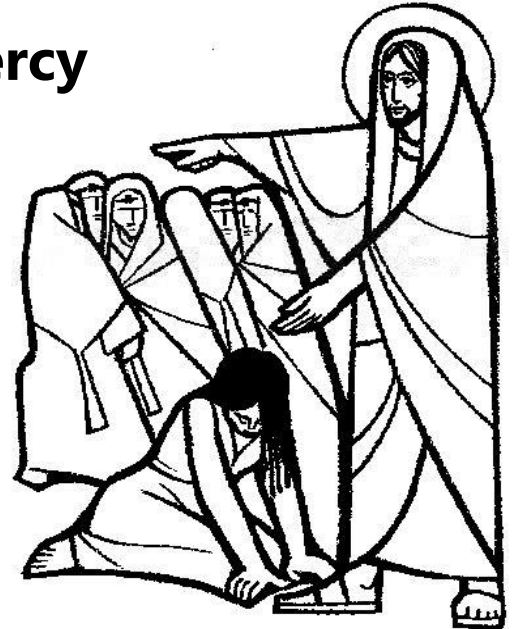


Women of Faith: The Gift of Mercy

(14th February 2024: An Ash Wednesday love story for St Valentines Day)

A woman is dragged to Jesus' feet.
Her name unknown. 'Caught in the act' – it was she who was guilty, not the man in the equation.
A trap is set for Jesus, who upturned it into an opportunity – into an expression of love.

*Jesus bent down and wrote in the sand.
John 8.6 (Ash Wednesday)*



Who is she? Where is the man? What are the circumstances?
How many women does she represent? Women unjustly judged – victims of circumstances or abuse? Or simply victims of their own decisions? How does she feel at the feet of the man of God, in a crowd of 'righteous' men? Amidst the noisy accusations, did she hear the words he spoke?

"Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone." John 8.7

... and they went away, one by one, the eldest first. (For most of us become more aware of our own miscreant behaviour as we grow older.)

How does she feel, left alone with Jesus; the weight of past events, the fear of the stones of judgement, now lifted; her accusers absent; the air so still that even the grains of sand that spelled the words of liberation can be heard as they blow away in the breeze? Did Jesus know her circumstances? Did he measure her shame, her guilt or innocence? (We know from sub-postmasters how heavily shame can weigh on the lives of the wrongly accused.)

"Has no-one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you, Go your way..."

Despite how little we know about this woman, we can be sure that this encounter would change her life – her faith in God, in Jesus, would be the mainstay of all her future decisions, thoughts, words and actions. So, who are we to judge? How do we judge ourselves? In Jesus we see the measure of God's love and mercy across the sands of time. So we may pray for the work of MU amongst vulnerable women in all societies across the world, the Rise Up project, and care for those convicted of crime.

'I like to think that hell is empty: I hope that's the reality' Pope Francis 14 January 2024