

USING AND ABUSING POWER



The Mount of Temptation, Israel

In her interpretation of Luke 4:1-13 **Kathleen Rushton** discusses the biblical character *diabolos* and the temptations Jesus faced to abuse power and derail his ministry.

In the temptations of Jesus in Luke's gospel (Lk 4:1-13) the character called "devil" (Greek *diabolos*; Hebrew *satan*) is one who tests loyalty to God. Usually loyalty testing is called "tempting" or "temptation."

In Job (1:6) we find that *diabolos* was thought of as a being who was part of the heavenly court and who tested the trustworthiness of God's faithful ones. By the time the gospels were written, people no longer thought of the *diabolos* as part of the heavenly court. The *diabolos* was understood to be an adversary or tempter who exposed the people to evil. The *diabolos* became the explanation for the evil impulse in the world.

The core of Jesus' temptations is the enticement to abuse relationships—*whakawhanaungatanga* (right relationship) with Earth, people and God. The biblical text of the temptations of Jesus assists us now to reflect on the use and abuse of power in relationship with Earth, people and God.

Literary Context

Luke frames the temptations on one side with Jesus' baptism when he is immersed in the waters, the womb of Earth (Lk 3:21), and his genealogy (Lk 3:23-38) and on the other, with the beginning of his teaching (Lk 4:14-30). According to the biblical scholar, John Pilch, the Mediterranean cultural

world of Jesus held "a deeply rooted belief in spirits who exist in numbers too huge to count and whose major pastime is interfering capriciously in daily human life." People depended on an array of amulets, formulas and symbols to ward off attacks from spirits. Luke writes the gospel story against this cultural background.

The highest honour is given to Jesus at his baptism when "a voice came from heaven" declaring: "You are my Son, the Beloved" (Lk 3:22). The genealogy of Jesus echoes "son of" to stress this divine testimony and concludes by identifying Jesus as "son of Adam, son of God." Culturally such a declaration would have been

important for the social and public acknowledgement of paternity. It gave a child legitimacy, social standing and required the father to accept responsibility for the child.

The voice from heaven not only acknowledges Jesus as "my Son" but continues: "with you I am well pleased." Further, those hearing this story would know that all the spirits heard it too. Therefore a test should follow to see if it was true. Spirits would try to make Jesus do something displeasing to God.

The biblical context

Jesus is not protected by customary amulets. Instead he returned from the Jordan river "full of the Holy Spirit," which is how Luke describes prophetic figures. Jesus is led into the wilderness by the Spirit where for 40 days he was tempted by the *diabolos*.

Echoes of the symbolic biblical reality can be heard. The Greek word for "tested/tempted" is the same word used for the testing of the people by God in the wilderness of Zin for 40 years and for their testing of God (Exodus 16:4; 17:2; Deuteronomy 8:2).

Jesus engages in one-to-one dialogue with the *diabolos*. Both quote Scripture. Jesus replies to each temptation by quoting Deuteronomy (8:3; 6:13; 6:16). The *diabolos* quotes from Psalm 91:11–12 (used as the responsorial psalm for the First Sunday of Lent). The *diabolos* is the chief opponent along with his helpers, demons and unclean spirits, of a counter-reign to God's *basileia* (Lk 11:14–20).

Whakawhanaungatanga (right relationship) with creation

Jesus was probably in the Judean wilderness of Perea. Life was sustainable there for nomads and for settlements because food and water were available, though limited. The wilderness was also a place which enabled deeper encounter with the self and discovery of new purpose, when a person was freed from life in the "real world." God was felt to be close in the wilderness. The *diabolos* tests Jesus at the level of physical hunger as he had eaten nothing for

Reading for the 1st Sunday of Lent 14 February

40 days (Lk 4:2). The story begins and ends with references to "stone" (Lk 4:3, 11) which the *diabolos* tempts Jesus to use to prove his filial relationship with God. The challenge is direct: "If you are the Son of God ... change this stone into bread".

Jesus refuses to use his power to change the Earth element, stone, and mimic the power of God to give "bread in the wilderness" (Exodus 16:14–21). Earth is to be cared for and respected, not manipulated and exploited. Jesus does not have to prove he is "Son of God." He honours his genealogical connection as "son of Adam" so preserving the link in Genesis 2:7 between *ādām* from *hādāma* (from the earth/ground). In other words, he is an earthling from the earth, a groundling from the ground.

Whakawhanaungatanga (right relationship) with people

The location of the second temptation is unclear. The *diabolos* led Jesus "up" and showed him "all the kingdoms of the world (*oikoumene*)."¹ The word for "world" suggests the inhabited world, the whole household of Earth. "Up" may mean the traditionally known Mount of Temptation or Jebel Quruntul. You can see for miles from the top – the oasis city of Jericho, the oldest city on earth, with the Dead Sea to the south, then on the western skyline is the towering Mount of Olives and views of surrounding lands divided into kingdoms.

The *diabolos* promises that all this political and military control of humans, kingdoms and natural resources will be given to Jesus if he worships the *diabolos*. The word used for "worship" suggests the homage made to rulers in the East. Jesus refuses again.

Whakawhanaungatanga (right relationship) with God

The third temptation, which focuses on Jesus' ability to force God's protection, is at the Temple in

Jerusalem – the place where Luke's gospel begins and ends. It is the symbolic meeting place of Heaven and Earth.

The *diabolos* placed Jesus on its pinnacle (*pterugion*). The word means "wing" and evokes the wings of the eagle, an image of God's care and protection (Deuteronomy 32:11). Above the entrance of the Temple were two symbolic eagle's wings. However, shadows surround the Temple for it was reconstructed by Herod, exercising his power and exploitation during his massive programme of rebuilding of the city. The third temptation begins also with: "If you are the Son of God ..." The *diabolos* refers again to a stone when quoting Psalm 91 on the protection of God.

The *diabolos* then departs "for a time" (Lk 4:13). Later in the gospel we find the threefold betrayal by Peter (Lk 22:54–62) and the threefold taunting of Jesus on the cross (Lk 23:35; 37, 39). But John the Baptist spoke of the "more powerful one" than himself (Lk 3:16). Jesus will speak of himself and his actions using similar words: that only a "more powerful one" or "one stronger" may cast out the evils God's people face (Lk 11:22).

Reflecting on Whakawhanaungatanga during Lent

The wilderness of the 40 days of Lent, a time of closeness to God, offers us space to reflect on Jesus' refusal to abuse power personally, structurally and ecologically. We might think about how we are tempted to exert control over the material world. How we are tempted to exert control over people. And how we are tempted to force God to protect us. ■



Kathleen Rushton RSM tends her vegetable garden, walks in the hope her feet will allow her to tramp again and delights in learning about Scripture.

Jesus, the Woman and the Pharisees

John 8:1-11



Painting: *The Woman Caught in Adultery* by Chris Higham www.bultonrock.co.uk

Although the story of Jesus, the woman and her accusers is thought to go back to the life of Jesus, it was not until the third century that it was included in the canonical tradition. Even then, this incident took a long time to settle into John's gospel where we find it today, in John 8:1-11. Some ancient manuscripts place it in two other places, others in Luke's gospel, and some omit it altogether.

The story was opposed and suppressed because Jesus' forgiving words were at odds with the ancient Church's penitential discipline. Augustine, for example, wrote that men feared this story would "make their women immune to punishment for their sins."

Scripture scholar, Raymond Brown, described the essence of the story as a "succinct expression of the mercy of Jesus." Augustine had also commented on the woman and Jesus — "only two remain, the wretched one and the incarnation of mercy." The delicate balance between Jesus' justice in not condoning the sin and his mercy towards the woman, invites us to ponder our practice in this Year of Mercy.

Scene one: "To stone such women"

It is early morning. "All the people" come to Jesus, who begins teaching in the Temple (Jn 8:1-2). Three scenes follow about both the Scribes and

Pharisees, and the woman (Jn 8:3-6a; Jn 8:6b-7; Jn 8:8-11). In the first scene, the Scribes and Pharisees led to Jesus a woman caught in adultery, to ask him to join in condemning her because the Torah said: "Moses commanded us to stone such women."

In her recent novel about the morally complex King David, *The Secret Chord*, Geraldine Brooks describes stoning in the voice of Batsheva, David's eighth wife. Batsheva was Uriah's wife when David watched her bathing during her ritual purification and desired her. David sent for her and raped her in the palace. Batsheva asks: "Have you ever seen a woman stoned to death, Natan? I have. My father made me

watch when I was a girl so I would know what became of faithless wives. And when my monthly signs did not come, I thought of that woman, the sounds of her moans, her mashed flesh, her shattered bone . . . At the end she had no face . . ."

It is important not to pit Jesus against Judaism, by seeing the stoning of women as unique to the Jewish Torah. According to the New Testament scholar Luise Schottroff, "every legal system of antiquity threatens women, whose sexuality is the possession of a man (father or husband), with severe punishment or death in the case of adultery or pre-marital intercourse."

Stoning is an execution performed by a group, or community, that is threatened by a particular deed. Men throw stones at the victim in a specific order related to the rank of those who were injured, or claim to be so.

An account of the stoning of an allegedly adulterous Iranian woman in 1990, records that her father threw the first stone, followed by her husband, the Imam and then her sons. Each man was plaintiff, judge, and executioner. A crowd participated in the collective rage. The woman was buried in a hole up to her shoulders. The mayor drew a chalk circle around her. She was in the middle.

"In the middle"

Jesus faces a real event not a theoretical debate. The stoning is imminent. The woman is placed literally "in the middle" (Jn 8:3) – other translations have "in full view of everyone" or "before them all". She is facing death. The Scribes and Pharisees expected Jesus, a Jewish male, to be responsible and to condemn and to participate.

However, not all Scribes and Pharisees (or Imams and their communities) behave in this way. The ones in the Johannine text are zealots, indignantly enforcing the Torah. They are intent on finding fault with Jesus by opposing him to the Torah. They have no interest in the woman, her allegedly wronged husband, or the other man. If they had, both the man and woman caught in adultery should die (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22).

Scene two: Jesus and the Scribes and Pharisees

The collective nature of the way the woman was seized and condemned calls on Jesus to take his place in the male hierarchy. They expect him to collude with the male collective as judge and executioner. But he does not answer.

Jesus bends and writes on the ground with his finger. His action disrupts their expectations. They continue to press for an answer so Jesus stands and addresses them directly: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (Jn 8:7).

Jesus has a sureness of touch; he can handle the situation . . . because he has nothing to be afraid of in himself . . . He must have completely accepted and integrated his own sexuality. Only a man who has, or at least begun to do so, can relate properly to women.

Scene Three: Jesus and the Woman

Then Jesus again bends, writing on the ground. The crowd of accusers leave one-by-one, according to rank. Then Jesus speaks to the woman for the first time: "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

He addresses the woman as "you" (Jn 8:10). She is no longer an object. Through unconditional forgiveness, she is able to enter into a relationship with Jesus. On the basis of this relationship, Jesus can challenge her to sin no more. "From this moment

on" (literally "from this now on"), the moment of her encounter with Jesus, she is offered the possibility of new life: physical life and a life of right relationship with God.

Civic Moral Courage

Jesus, as an independent interpreter of the Torah, places the offence of adultery, which in patriarchal society made women vulnerable to unjust allegations and treatment, on a level with offences such as theft and defamation. He disputes the status of adultery (shared with idolatry) as a crime requiring death. Scripture scholar, Luise Schottroff, calls his action, civic moral courage.

This story shows gender social constructions. The paper, *Women as Actors in Addressing Climate Change*, from the United Nations Convention on Climate Change, 2015, defines it as: "the array of 'socially constructed' roles, behaviours, attributes, aptitudes, and relative powers linked with being a woman or a man in a society at any given time. The term 'socially constructed' means that they are not 'innate' or 'natural' characteristics but constructions and products of a society and, as such, can be modified and transformed."

Jesus acted with courage. Benedictine Sister, Maria Boulding noted: "The Pharisees are tense, but [Jesus] is calm and relaxed throughout; he accepts the woman openly and lovingly, as an adult and as a person. He has a sureness of touch; he can handle the situation with her because he has nothing to be afraid of in himself . . . He must have completely accepted and integrated his own sexuality. Only a man who has, or at least begun to do so, can relate properly to women."

This year of Mercy is our opportunity to practise courage too. ■



Kathleen Rushton RSM tends her vegetable garden, walks in the hope her feet will allow her to tramp again and delights in learning about Scripture.

5th Sunday Lent
13 March 2016

JESUS THE RESURRECTED GARDENER



Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalen by Juan de Flandes

Kathleen Rushton traces the themes of creating and re-creating in John 20:1-9 and highlights the resurrected Jesus as completing the work of the Divine Gardener.

Easter Sunday 27 March 2016

Time and again, we hear that in John's resurrection story Mary Magdalene was confused when, "weeping outside the tomb," she turned, saw Jesus and thought he was the gardener (John 20:11, 15). It could be that Mary was confused. It well may be, also that Mary was absolutely correct — Jesus is the gardener. How can this be so? In John's gospel many strands of creation and re-creation are evoked to tell the story of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus. Creation and re-creation interweave. In the Scriptures, creation is the Garden of God. God is the Gardener. John's gospel begins by evoking the garden of Genesis: "In the beginning..." (Jn 1:1) and ends with: "Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb" (Jn 19:41). Here incarnation, death and resurrection are linked with re-creation. Jesus is the Gardener!

The climax of the liturgical year is the feast of the Resurrection. During the octave of Easter, John 20 is proclaimed in the eucharistic liturgy. Eastertide continues over six weeks, keeping in focus the risen Jesus who empowers the people of God every day of the year. Pithily, Augustine describes our identity and new way of being: "We are an Easter people and alleluia is our song." Benedict XVI describes re-creation through Jesus' resurrection as "like an explosion of light, an explosion of love ... It ushered in a new dimension of being ... It is a qualitative leap in the history of 'evolution' and of life in general towards a new future life, towards a new world which, starting from Christ, already continuously permeates this world of ours, transforms it and draws it to itself." (*Easter Vigil Homily*, 2006).

The Divine Gardener

God "planted a garden in Eden, in the East" (Genesis 2:8). Like a gardener, God cultivated it (Gen 2:9) and walked in it (Gen 3:8). Elsewhere, God is described explicitly as a gardener (Numbers 24:6; 4; Maccabees 1:29). Throughout the first five verses of John's gospel, other creation motifs are evoked — light, life and darkness. As God is central to biblical creation, so too is Jesus inserted into God's creation. In the prologue, Jesus is portrayed as Wisdom-Sophia, who was with God at the beginning of the work of creation (Proverbs 8:22-36). Only John's gospel places the death-resurrection of Jesus in a garden. In addition, we are told that Jesus rose on the first day of the week (Jn 20:1) and also appears to his disciples on the first day of the week (Jn 20:19).

"Let there be light"

In the Genesis creation narrative, the first specific creative act of God deals with the darkness which covered the earth. God acts by the creative word: "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3). Darkness is not dispelled by the creation of light but ordered in relation to light. In John's incarnation narrative, the Word was the life which was "the light of all people" (Jn 1:3). "The One", later named as Jesus, is: "The light [which] shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it" (Jn 1:5). The resurrection narrative begins, also, with darkness evoking re-creation: "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb" (Jn 20:1).

We are called to enter into God's creative process for in "the Christian understanding of the world the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ."

In Genesis 3:3, the woman tells the serpent that they are not to touch the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. Exactly the same Greek verb is used when Jesus tells Mary Magdalene not to touch him (Jn 19:18). A link is made here between the woman of Genesis who does not obey and Mary Magdalene who does obey by telling the disciples that Jesus has risen. It would seem here, too, by the use of the verb "touch," the materiality of the body is acknowledged.

Completing the Works of God

Several times we hear about how the works of God are to come to completion in Jesus. This is especially so as Jesus' death approaches. Just before he said: "I am thirsty," we are told: "Jesus knew that all was finished." His last words on the cross are: "It is finished." Earlier, Jesus had explained his own work in relation to God's work. His food is to finish the works of God (Jn 4:34). God gave him works to finish (Jn 5:36). These references echo Genesis where: "God rested from all the work that God had done in creation" (Gen 2:2). A completed creation is sealed by Sabbath rest, yet God's work is incomplete. Jesus continues God's work. He heals and re-creates even on the Sabbath.

Re-creation

As Jesus rose on the first day of the week (Jn 20:1), he appears to his disciples also on the evening of the first day of the week (Jn 20:19). The centrepiece of John 20 are the verses 19-23 when the disciples were gathered and Jesus came and "stood in the midst" of the community. This positioning of the Risen One links back to the tree of life in the midst of the garden (Gen 2:9). Jesus on the cross, too, was in the middle of two others who were crucified with him (Jn 19:18).

Two actions unfold, initiated by Jesus. His "Peace be with you" greeting fulfills his promise to give a peace the world cannot give (cf. Jn 14:27; 16:33). He shows them his hands and his side. Repeating the gift of peace, Jesus, then, commissions the new People of God as he had been commissioned by God. Second, he "breathed on them" saying

"Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20:22). The verb "breathed on" is found only here in the NT and three times in the Greek Bible (of the early Church) referring directly to creation. Jesus' action evokes God giving life to the Earth creature (*adam*) who was formed from the Earth (*ha'adam*) with God's breath. (Gen 2:7, cf. Wisdom 15:11). The prophet Ezekiel is told to breathe on the dry bones that the House of Israel may be re-created.

John 20 concludes by referring to the believers "of all times" (Jn 20: 30-31), in other words, the Church. We are called to enter into God's creative process for in "the Christian understanding of the world the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ." (*Laudato Si'* par 99). Pope Francis also pointed out that "The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth." (*Laudato Si'* par 66). Deborah Manning's disturbing yet hopeful article (TM March 2016) offers a practical alternative to the environmental impact of organic material rotting in landfills in Aotearoa New Zealand. She outlines how that food can be collected to feed the needy. We are an Easter people and alleluia is our song. We are to be Gardeners in the work of re-creation: "Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope" (*Laudato Si'* par 244). ■



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BELIEF IN JESUS CHANGED THE CHURCH

Kathleen Rushton shows in John 16 how a new way of telling the story of Jesus grew out of the Johannine community's experience of being Christian.



The Last Supper. 6th Century mosaic, Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, Ravenna.

Science has demonstrated beyond all doubt that our universe is unfinished. In his 2015 book, *Resting on the Future: Catholic Theology for an Unfinished Universe*, John Haught asks "what Catholic faith might mean if we take fully into account the fact that our universe is on the move . . . What if [we] began to take more seriously the evolutionary understanding of life and the ongoing pilgrimage of the whole natural world? . . . that the cosmos, the earth, and humanity, rather than having wandered away from an original plentitude, are now and always invited toward the horizon of fuller being up ahead?" Haught recalls that especially in *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dei Verbum*, Vatican II encouraged Catholics "to become more evolutionary in their understanding of the world and more biblical in their spirituality." Haught's insights and questions inform my reflection and interpretation of John 16.

The context of John 16:29-33 is a conversation between Jesus and unnamed disciples and divides into three parts – Jn 16:1-15; Jn 16:24; Jn 16:25-33. Each part has a similar threefold structure: a declaration of Jesus; a reaction by the disciples; and a further declaration by Jesus in response to the disciples' reaction.

This chapter in John is one of the farewell discourses in which there is much talk about the future, questions about moving beyond the known, confusion, notions of time and a new vision of life obtainable for all who follow Jesus. Speaking just before his arrest, trial and death, Jesus is preparing the disciples for his departure and for their life in his absence. This future which Jesus envisions in John is the reality for us today because the Church

Jn 16:29-33 Seventh Sunday of Easter 9 May; Jn 16:12-15 Trinity Sunday 22 May

lives without the physical presence of Jesus and is sustained by his words.

Written by Believers for Believers

A gospel is an interpretative narrative of the appearance, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and tells of the significance of that story for those who hear or read it. It was told by believers for believers in particular situations.

The social context in the Mediterranean world was more complex than Jewish/Christian tensions. In first century Palestine and in Ephesus where probably John's gospel was written, believers were subjects of the Roman Empire. All religious, social and economic life was under imperial domination. The Book of Revelation shows this tension. The theological concern of the writer was to expose the Roman Empire for what it is—a threat to the reign of God in the world—and to encourage Christians to resist its values.

The Johannine gospel, written probably in the 90s, emerged from this setting and is shaped by resistance and witness. To understand the religious interactions we need to remember the background in which readers/hearers faced difficult choices. They could remain in their local synagogue as members of a religious group that had official recognition in the empire and avoid the scrutiny of its officials. They could stay with the synagogue while at the same time also worshipping secretly as Christians. They could break away from the synagogue, worship openly as Christians and risk the consequences.

John encourages the last choice. We find the expression, "put out of the synagogue" (*aposunagogos* Jn 16:2) which was used previously in Jn 9:21–22 and Jn 12:42. In the whole of Greek literature this word is found only in John. Finally after a process lasting decades, the Johannine community's belief in Jesus led to a parting of the ways. That brave Church went out of the world they loved and began to tell the old story of Jesus in new and often unique ways as we now read in the prologue and the farewell discourses.

Gathering of Present and Future Communities

We read in the latter stages of Jesus' ministry that his death is connected with the gathering of present and future communities. Jesus will bring other sheep into the fold (Jn 10:15–16); gather the dispersed children of God (Jn 11:50–52); many will believe in him (Jn 12:11); Greeks come to him (Jn 12:20–23); and when he is lifted up he will draw all people to himself (Jn 12:32).

The future and the present merge in a single narrative moment in ways that contest the usual understandings of time. God and Jesus are present and interact without being confined by past, present and future. Jesus' words concern his future which he implies is also connected with the future of the disciples and with that of the reader. The transformation and the merging of the times are conveyed by the mysterious word, "hour", which is used in various ways with the verb "come" (Jn 16:2, 4, 21, 25, 32). "My/the hour" is an image for Jesus' death-resurrection and draws others also into the mystery. For these times, there are words of promise and assurance (Jn 16:12–15 and Jn 16:33).

I have said these things to you

The discourse moves between the present and future to indicate that a new age has begun. Jesus' words containing the expression "put out of the synagogue" (Jn 16:2) are framed by his saying: "I have said these things to you" (Jn 16:1, 4) to keep disciples from stumbling and to remind them of his words when that time comes. "I have said these things/to this to you" is repeated three more times (Jn 16:6, 25, 33). In Jn 16:12–15 there is a change of tense which suggests the future: "I still have many things to say to you." Here Jesus links his departure with the coming of the Spirit of Truth. He has already told the disciples that his going is to their advantage for otherwise the Advocate will not come (Jn 16:7). Jesus then describes the twofold role of the Spirit: to expose (Jn 16: 8–11) and to guide (Jn 16:12–15).

Speaking Plainly/Frankly

In 16:29–33 the disciples react to Jesus: "now you are speaking plainly". Speaking "plainly" or "plainly" (*parrēsia*)

was a characteristic of the ancient ideal of friendship. The biblical figure of Wisdom *Sophia* gathered her friends. The earthly Jesus gathered his friends. Later the Risen Jesus gathers the Johannine community, and communities throughout the ages, in the Eucharist to be "friends of God and prophets" (Wisdom 7:27). Wisdom *Sophia* cries out for justice at the street corners. Likewise, Jesus lived his ministry publicly and spoke out frankly, often in Jerusalem, the centre of religious and political power (John 7:4, 13, 26; Jn 10:24; Jn 11:14, 54; Jn 16:25, 29; Jn 18:20). This led to Jesus' death. Ancient writers, like Plato and Aristotle, wrote of another ideal of friendship as the love which leads one to lay down one's life for friends. Jesus' life is the incarnation of such friendship (Jn 15:12–15).

Telling the Old story in a Bold New Way

John Haught writes of creating a "spiritual space for a fresh throb of hope" and of living a biblical spirituality of "Abrahamic adventure." The Johannine community gave us a new gospel. So how can we tell the old story in a bold new way? How do we become more evolutionary in our understanding of the world and more biblical in our spirituality? What is the Empire in our situation? What choices do we face? About what are we called to speak "frankly?" ■



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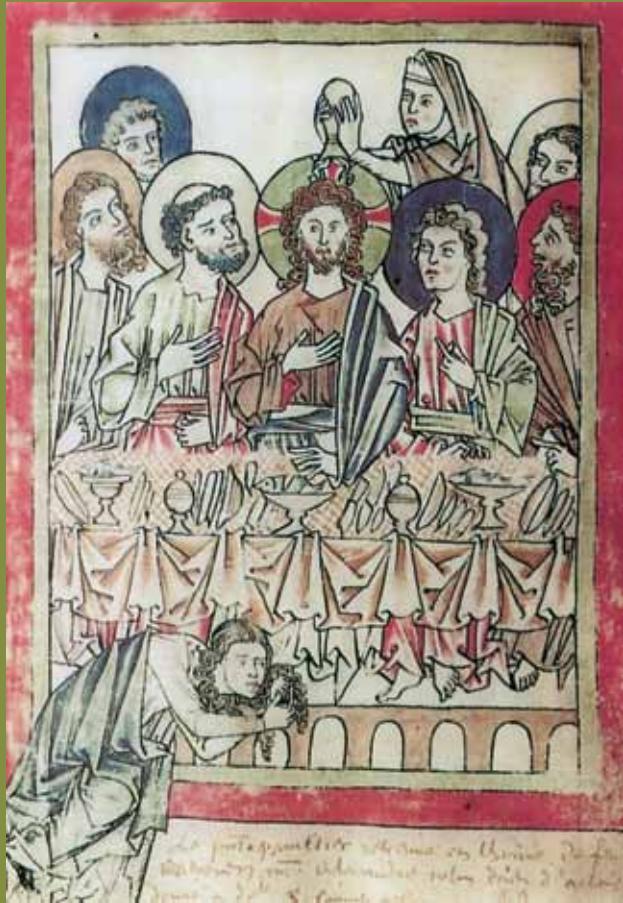
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The Anointing. Illustration, dated 1260, in Psalter of a Cistercian Monastery in Basel, Switzerland.

THE ANOINTING WOMAN

Kathleen Rushton reveals that the woman who anoints Jesus' head in Simon the Pharisee's house in Luke 7:36-8:3 is a different woman from Mary Magdalene or Mary of Bethany, with whom tradition has confused her.

11th Sunday of Ordinary Time
12th June

Do you share the surprise on the faces of the two disciples on the left and right of the woman at the top of the remarkable *The Anointing* illustration of 1260? My students do. After comparing and contrasting the anointing woman stories in the four gospels, they exclaim: "Anointing Jesus' head? Never heard that before!"

The two stories telling of a woman anointing Jesus' head for healing as he faces his coming death (Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9), are eclipsed in interpretation and art. The focus was on the woman called a sinner who anoints Jesus' feet (Lk 7:36-50) or on Mary of Bethany (Jn 12:1-8). *The Anointing* shows both traditions.

The *Sunday Roman Lectionary* also eclipses the head-anointing tradition despite Jesus' words that "wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her." Mark's account is heard in the passion story on Palm Sunday (Year B). Only Luke's anointing woman is proclaimed (Year C, 11th Sunday of Ordinary Time). Lk 8:1-3 is added, which has contributed to fusing her with Mary Magdalene.

Ministering Women

I am beginning with a passage unique to Luke 8:1-3, in order to unravel who Luke's anointing woman is. Jesus went "through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God". Accompanying him were the twelve along with some women. We learn they "had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities"; seven demons had gone out from Mary called Magdalene; and "they provided for them out of their resources".

Ancients attributed many illnesses to demon possession. Demons can unite into an evil seven (Lk 8:2; Mt 12:45). "Seven" means a great number and indicates frequency and power (cf. Mk 16:9; Lk 11:26). The text emphasises the greatness of Jesus' power. However the interpretive tradition focused on Mary.

The Greek verb translated as "provided" (*diakonein*) has a range of meanings. In Luke's gospel it is applied to the mother-in-law of Simon (Lk 4:39), Martha (LK 10:40), vigilant servants (Lk 12:37) and in Jesus' instruction to his disciples at the Last Supper (Lk 22:25-27). In Lk 8:1-3 it is used of women, not in the domestic space of missionary travel.

Mary, Joanna, Suzanna and the women seem to be wealthy patrons of Jesus' mission. Joanna, wife of Chuza, King Herod's steward, had wealth and status. The use of material possessions and discipleship recurs in Luke-Acts. Jesus warns against wealth, tells of the faithful poor and invites some to leave their wealth and follow him. For some, the call to follow Jesus does not mean to leave their goods but to open their homes and share with the community. Christians were known for sharing everything in common (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37). These Lucan women are like Mary, at whose house disciples gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12) and Lydia, seller of purple cloth (Acts 16:14).

She is Not Mary Magdalene

A dominant error in the Western Church since the time of Gregory the Great has been the fusion of several gospel women into one character — Mary Magdalene, the assumed sexual sinner. In the 1962 *Marian Missal* we find the heading for the 22nd July feast day: St Mary Magdalen, Penitent, and a blurb describes her as "first a sinner ... converted by the Lord". She was

by the cross. Jesus showed himself to her and made her his messenger to announce his resurrection to the apostles. The Collect Prayer further confuses her with Lazarus's sister: "Jesus in answer to her prayers didst raise her brother Lazarus to life, after he had been dead for four days". The gospel for the day (Lk 7:36-50) further confuses her with yet another woman. This fusion and confusion of the sinner who anointed Jesus' feet with Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene at the cross and witness to the resurrection, lingers even today in the imagination, art and preaching.

Some form of the word “anointing” is used five times . . . The woman’s touching of Jesus’ feet, washing them with her hair and anointing them, are all bodily expressions.

We find a very different focus in the 1969 *Missal* issued in the Liturgical Reform of Vatican II and in the retranslated *Missal* (2010). The Proper Prayers for the feast speak of Mary Magdalene as the first person entrusted by Jesus “with the joyful news of his resurrection”. The gospel is the story of Jesus’ resurrection and commission (Jn 20:1-2; 11-18). The *Missals* erase centuries of sexualising and demonising Mary Magadelene. They reinstate Mary Magdalene officially to her early Church title, Apostle of the Apostles. In the Eastern Church, which has never regarded her as sexual sinner, she has the title, Equal to the Apostles.

Who Is the Woman?

Luke is the only evangelist to describe the one who anoints Jesus' feet as "a woman in the city, who was a sinner" (Lk 7:37). He uses the same word for sinner (*hamartolos*) to describe the woman and Peter (Lk 5:8). (Interpreters have never speculated about the nature of Peter's sinfulness even though Luke stresses this in his "call" story.)

The anointing story is set in the context of a meal in Galilee during Jesus' ministry. The meals of the well-to-do were in two phases. During the first appetisers were served as servants waited on guests, washing and anointing them with perfumed oils. The main courses followed. Men and women ate separately and a widow was the only woman permitted to serve men at meals. Simon the Pharisee had taken no measures to ensure other women did not enter. He had not provided the expected hospitality. However the woman does.

Some form of the word “anointing” is used five times in the narrative (Lk 7:38, 46). The woman’s touching of Jesus’ feet, washing them with her hair and anointing them are all bodily expressions. They are combined with elements of the Earth – a precious alabaster jar filled with expensive perfumed vegetable oil (*myron*).

A tension exists in this text. While Lk 7:37 states the woman was a sinner, the tense of the Greek verb means "used to be." Then in some ancient literature anointing feet with myron had strong sexual connotations. The focus slips to the forgiveness of sins rather than staying on the healing tradition of the woman anointing Jesus as he faced death. The woman's

actions and motivation are more important than her sinfulness.

A parable about debtors is inserted. The central point is forgiveness. John Pilch explains how Mediterranean peasants got into debt. Their meagre resources were taken by tithes, taxes and tolls. When they became indebted and unable to repay their loans, they lost their lands and became tenant share croppers. Jesus' ancestors may have shared that fate, as those dispossessed of land often became artisans, like the carpenters. Material indebtedness through the powerful's injustice and land exploitation in the parable told by Jesus, helped to illustrate the forgiveness of sin. Exploitation by indebtedness and negative sexual connotations underpin this narrative.

Kevin Beale in *Blood and Earth: Modern Slavery, Ecocide, and the Secret to Saving the World* (2016) tells heart-wrenching stories of vulnerable people in the Eastern Congo, who through indebtedness are driven from their lands and end up in slavery in our own times. It includes working in mines and quarries which bring about the degradation of the Earth through the extraction of minerals like tin and coltan used to make my cell phone. Women particularly suffer sexual violence in addition to hard labour. We can reflect on how Luke might tell his story in this context? And how Jesus might tell his parable of debtors? ■



Kathleen Rushton RSM tends her vegetable garden, walks in the hope her feet will allow her to tramp again and delights in learning about Scripture.



In the larger journey section of Luke 9:51–19:22, Jesus answers a lawyer's question by asking a question. He then tells a parable which begins and ends with a wounded man (Lk 10:30,35) who is the focus for three people on a journey. They are from different classes — a priest (Lk 10:31), a Levite (Lk 10:32) and a Samaritan (Lk 10:33, 35). They arrive, see and respond.

Vincent van Gogh's painting, completed a few months before his tragic death, places the wounded one in the centre of his depiction of Luke 10:25–37. He portrays mercy as action-orientated, interactive and found in unexpected places. The face of the wounded man is that of his brother, Theo, who had carried Vincent through his psychological and financial difficulties. Vincent painted himself in the role of the Samaritan. In this reversal, both stand in need of mercy which is both given and received. Jesuit, James Keenan, describes mercy as "the willingness to enter into the chaos of others" and invites us to journey into the many layers of this parable of mercy.

A Heart Moved with Compassion

The three men journeying the lonely 27 kms descent from Jerusalem to Jericho saw the wounded one but only the Samaritan "had a heart moved with compassion" (*splagnizomai*) Lk 10:33. This verb and its other forms in the New Testament means being moved from the depths of one's being. It evokes the noun for womb-compassion (*rahahim*) which comes from the Hebrew word for womb (*rehem*).

There is a threefold pattern. There is a description of need, then a person is described as "having a heart moved with compassion", and something must be done to address the need the heart has felt. We find this pattern in two other parables — when the father sees his lost son return (Lk 15:20) and when a person is caught in a huge debt (Mt.18:24–25, 27). Jesus, whose life and actions are the incarnation of God's mercy, is described as "having a heart moved with compassion" when he met the funeral of the widow's son (Lk 7:13) and healed the men who were blind (Mt 20:34). This threefold pattern is repeated when Jesus sees that the crowd "were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9:36) and cured their sick (Mt 14:14).



A Heart Moved to Mercy

Kathleen Rushton provides new insights into the parable of the wounded man in Luke 10:25–37.

15th Sunday of Ordinary Time 10 July

Painting: *The Good Samaritan*, by Vincent van Gogh (after Delacroix) 1890

Matthew says that after a great crowd had been with Jesus for three days he had compassion for them because they were hungry (Mt 15:32).

A Very Different World From Ours

The great crowds were mostly poor Jews living under various systems of the Roman occupation and making their livelihood from the land or sea. They had a collective history of being ruled by other nations. In the broadest sense most were rural peasants with little power over their economic or political situation and dominated by landlords and overlords. They were required to give in taxes any surplus they earned. If they fell into debt they lost their land. The land then fell into the hands of fewer and fewer. The poor became tenants, day labourers and some, like Jesus, were village artisans.

In this world the peasants may well have seen the bandits as heroes standing for justice, as social bandits who robbed the rich to help the poor. Possibly even those who first heard this story may have identified more with the bandits than with the wounded man.

Cultural Background

The Samaritan's response to the wounded man showed generosity and care above cultural expectations. The well-known hatred and separation that existed between Jews and Samaritans has led us to see the Samaritan as "good" for coming to the wounded man's aid. He was presumably a Jew from Jerusalem. However this obscures much about the Samaritan and the cultural situation of Jesus' first hearers.

The story gives indications that the Samaritan is a merchant or trader. He journeys (Lk 10:33), he has an animal to carry his goods and he has with him two items typical of trade at the time – oil and wine (Lk 10:34). Traders were unpopular with peasants who regarded them as part of the system that oppressed and exploited them. Traders were despised by the elites who regarded them as new wealth and upstarts.

It seems that as a trader the Samaritan knew a typical stopping place for commercial people and he took the wounded man to an inn (Lk 10:35). Public inns were notorious for being dirty, noisy and basic. Only persons without families or social connections would dare stay at such a place. Also innkeepers had low moral reputations. The Samaritan took the wounded man to the inn, put himself into debt and gave himself and the man he was helping into the hands of the innkeeper.

Showing Mercy

The Samaritan showed mercy to the wounded man and drew on all he had available to care for him. He used the medicinal qualities of oil and wine on his wounds and fabric for bandages. His animal carried the wounded man and he paid for the stay at the inn with coins.

The threefold pattern in this parable guides us into the works of mercy: we see a need, then "having a heart moved with compassion" we decide how to address the need the heart has felt. In a world of structural sin where political and economic systems function to benefit those with

power and wealth, immense harm is done to the majority of people. Mercy takes us to the root causes of suffering and injustice, to the works of justice.

No interpretation of Jesus' parables can be made with absolute certainty because parables are not stories with neat, tidy answers. They are ambiguous and unpredictable, inviting the hearer to discover the reign of God. New Testament scholar, Douglas Oakman, suggests this parable is not about neighbourliness but what the kingdom is like, implying that the reign of God is found in unlikely and even immoral places. It is a parable of reversal. The lawyer to whom Jesus told the parable could not cope with where he found mercy. Instead of answering with the term Samaritan, he answers Jesus saying: "the one who showed mercy."

In Van Gogh's painting we see a portrayal of the giving and receiving of mercy. The two characters wear the same colour trousers, similar coloured head bands and one is losing his sandals to be bare-footed like the other. They show one act in "the great river of mercy which wells up and overflows unceasingly . . . from the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God" (Pope Francis, *Misericordia Vultus*, par 25). How might we give and receive justice and mercy in solidarity with those wounded by our political and economic systems? ■



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Learning from the Line of Women

Kathleen Rushton situates the visit of Mary to Elizabeth, Luke 1:39–56, within the story of biblical foremothers and points to the similarities and differences of their relationships.

**Feast of Assumption
(14 August – transferred)**

The actions and language of mercy permeate the opening chapter of the gospel according to Luke and surround the story of mercy known as The Visitation. Two women, Mary and Elizabeth, stand in the biblical tradition of mercy. Mary proclaims that God's mercy (*eleos*) is from generation to generation (Lk 1:50) and that God's care and faithfulness to Israel flow from God's mercy (*eleos*) (Lk 1:54). Later in this infancy narrative, Zechariah declares that God "has shown the mercy (*eleos*) promised to our ancestors, and has remembered God's holy covenant" (Lk 1:72).

Songs of Mary's Female Ancestors

The noun *eleos* meaning mercy, pity and compassion is used in relation to God. This Greek word is used frequently for the Hebrew word *hesed*, as for example, in Exodus 15:13: "In your steadfast love (*hesed*) you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode." This verse is from the song of Ex 1:1-18 which many biblical scholars understand to have been sung and led by Miriam. Luke's Mary, *Miryam* in Hebrew, has the same name as Moses's sister. Both women have significant roles in the biblical story and celebrate God's faithfulness. The many parallels between their songs include recalling what God has done for them personally, naming the powerful deeds done by God's right arm, exalting in the mercy and steadfast love of God, celebrating that God casts down those who oppose God's ways, relating how God has helped Israel and understanding God's reign as continuing forever.

Further, in the biblical mosaic of Mary's song of praise almost every line is patterned on the canticle of praise Hannah sang after the conception and birth of Samuel (1 Sam 2:1-10). Hannah and Samuel's story is woven throughout Luke's infancy narrative. When Hannah brought Samuel to the sanctuary to present him to God, they were greeted by the aged Eli. When Mary presents Jesus at the sanctuary of the Temple the aged Simeon and Anna greet them. Both Samuel and Jesus are described as growing in divine and human favour.

Mary's Song

Mary's reference to "generation after generation" and the promise God "made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants" includes not only the promise of descendants but of the land. Mary walks on the very land promised to her ancestors.

Her pregnant body is sustained by the Earth pregnant, too, with life. Mary journeys southward from Nazareth in Galilee over hills, through valleys and varied landscapes to a southern village in Judea about 160 kilometres away. It would have taken a week or more to arrive at this village about eight kilometres west of Jerusalem. It was identified later in Christian tradition as Ain Karem. Mary's body was sustained by the food grown in fields through which she passed. Her thirst was quenched by the water from streams and wells. She breathed deeply the life-giving air.

Mary describes herself as God's servant (*doule*, literally a female slave). The image of one who responds like a slave or servant has been negative in reinforcing women as passive. On the other hand Mary's song of mercy proclaims a radical song of reversal. God has "looked with favour" on her lowliness. She is young in a world that values age, female in a world ruled by males, poor and from a remote village in a stratified society. God favours one from the margins not from the centre of power. God's action for the poor, wounded and vulnerable is proclaimed: God "has lifted up the lowly ... filled the hungry with good things ... helped God's child (*paios* masculine, singular) Israel". In contrast God "scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts ... has brought down the powerful from their thrones and sent the rich away empty". Lucy D'Souza's painting of these women wearing colours of Earth and sky suggests the connection between the rejoicing Mary and Elizabeth and the abundant life-producing Earth and air. God's promise of mercy from generation to generation includes Earth and air, whose abundance and vitality are made poor through exploitation and pollution.

Bodiliness

In a close reading of Lk 1:39-56 we will discover some surprises. The opening words of Mary's hymn are translated usually as: "My soul (*psychē*) magnifies the Lord, and my spirit (*pneuma*) rejoices in God my Saviour" (Lk 1:47-48). The Greek *psychē*, translated from the Hebrew word *nepes*, means the whole living person not just what we understand as "the soul". And *pneuma* suggests an aspect of the self that is able to receive the Spirit. The dualism of thinking of soul and body as separate was introduced by Greek thought after Jesus' time and it is prominent still in Western cultures. But that distinction was not known in Jewish thought or elsewhere at that time. The gospel meanings of *psychē* and *pneuma* are very close and scarcely distinguishable. Scripture scholar Barbara Reid says both terms cover all that is meant by the personal pronoun "I."

When the Spirit-filled Elizabeth hears Mary's greeting she offers the first of many blessings found in the gospel. She blesses Mary in her own person first, in her own right. She then blesses the fruit of Mary's womb, her childbearing (Lk 1:43). Both women recognise God's action in their bodiliness, conception and the new life growing within them. Unlike stories of their biblical foremothers who rival each other, for example, Sarah and Hagar (Gen 16, 21) or Leah and Rachel (Gen 29-31), Mary and Elizabeth are supportive and understanding of each other. In their encounter we find a rare happening in scripture — a conversation between two women and an example of the wisdom and care that older women can offer younger women.

Recognising what God has Done for Her

Luke identifies the extraordinary character, Elizabeth, by her tribal origin. She is from the tribe of Aaron (Lk 1:5) and with her husband, Zachariah, is described as "righteous before God." After she becomes pregnant, her life-long relationship with God enables her to work out and know what God has done for her. Luke gives us access to her thoughts (Lk 1:24). In this she is singular among Luke's many characters who, having had a religious experience, do not reflect on it, or retell it inaccurately or without understanding (Lk 2:44; 3:15; 7:39; 11:17; 12:17; 12:19; 18:4; 19:11; 24:37).

Barbara Reid said of Mary and Elizabeth's meeting: "This scene invites those contemporary believers who mistrust women's ability to interpret God's word to accept that women as well as men know God's ways and reliably communicate them. It particularly encourages women to accept the companionship of other women as spiritual guides, theologians, confessors, retreat directors, teachers and preachers in their faith journeys." ■

Image: "Maria und Elisabeth" aus dem MISEREOR-Hungertuch "Biblische Frauengestalten – Wegweiser zum Reich Gottes" von Lucy D'Souza-Krone © MVG Medienproduktion, 1990



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Parables of the Lost and Stories of Mercy



Kathleen Rushton examines three parables of the lost in Luke 15:1–32 showing what they reveal about relationships with God and one another.

Luke 15:1–2 is the framework for understanding three parables of action and words of mercy – the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Sons. The Pharisees and scribes grumble: “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” To welcome (*dechomai*) implies hospitality and being host at a meal. An invitation to a meal suggests persons are accepted by the host for who they are. “All tax collectors and sinners” represent the social and religious outsiders. These people ate with Jesus and were “coming near to listen to him.” Previously, a division began between the rich and powerful and the poor and outcast about their attitudes to John’s baptism and the justice of God (Lk 7:29–30).

Humanity and God

Jesus pulls out all the stops when talking to these furious leaders who are critical of his table companions. Patterns ring out which reinforce Jesus’ words. The first two parables begin with a question, one centred on a

man and the other on a woman. Jesus invites these leaders to consider their response. The parable characters would have been offensive to the Pharisees.

Shepherds worked in a despised occupation. Jesus is direct: “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one . . . ?” His audience would have been shocked to have been addressed as if one of them was a lowly shepherd. Although Psalm 23 uses the shepherd as an image for God, the scriptures also evoke harsh criticism against “the shepherds of Israel” who did not care for the people (Ezekiel 34:1–24). Then Jesus expects the leaders to learn from a woman! They would have seen the behaviour of both shepherd and woman as foolish and over-the-top.

Each parable tells something about humanity and about God. The first and third begin: “Which one (*anthropos*) of you . . . ?” (Lk 15:4) and “There was a man (*anthropos*) who had

two sons . . .” (Lk 15:11) *Anthropos*, meaning the human person, suggests the human condition. Framed by these two parables, and still about humanity, is one concerning a woman’s experience (Lk 15:8).

The setting is likely to be a village or rural location. We are invited into the context of each parable and in the hard realities we glimpse images of God. These parables are addressed explicitly (Lk 15:4, 8) and implicitly (Lk 15:11) to the well-to-do and, maybe, absentee landlords and owners of peasant tenants and flocks. Different social and economic circumstances are presented. We see the poverty of the woman; the life of a probably not so poor shepherd; and life on a farm – which seems prosperous compared to the other two situations.

Five-Part Structure

Each parable is structured in five parts. They begin with an introduction or context followed by a search for the lost. Then the centre of the parable gathers the household

24th Sunday Ordinary Time,
11 September

to rejoice. A celebration follows, which ends with an expression of God's joy (first two parables) or the joy of the whole household (third parable).

The Lost Sheep

A flock of a hundred sheep would have belonged to a clan rather than to an individual. Several members would be tending a flock of that size. If someone lost a sheep that person would be accountable to the extended family. They would have been able to go off looking for the lost one without putting the rest of the flock into jeopardy. When the lost sheep was found, the whole family could celebrate.

The shepherd lifts the sheep and carries it back to the flock. I know from my childhood on a South Canterbury hill-country farm that sheep that had separated from the flock would often be distressed and refused to move. They would need to be carried back to the flock.

The Lost Coin

By lamplight the woman searched for a drachma in her window-less house. This coin had the same value as a denarius, which was the usual daily wage of the vineyard labourers (Matthew 20:9). A drachma represented one two-hundredth of the annual amount required for a person to subsist at the poverty level. It paid barely for two days of provisions and other needs. Like a denarius, a drachma symbolised the money for daily bread.

Ancient sources tell us that the economic survival of families then, as today, depended on the additional paid labour of women. Then, as now, women were paid half as much as men. The woman is searching for a drachma which took her twice as long to earn. An interesting nuance is that the terms for her "friends and neighbours" are female in Lk 15:6 in contrast to male terms for "friends and neighbours" in Lk 15:9. Women celebrated with women and men with men.

The Lost Sons

For the third parable it is difficult to give a title which does not obscure the triangular relationship of father and his two sons. The younger son's request for his inheritance is culturally offensive. Seeking to use his inheritance while his father is still living, is like regarding his father as dead. He views his inheritance as his due, not as a gift.

Agriculture was hazardous as the land was dry and subject to famine. In a foreign land the son is hired to feed pigs. He is taken on as a day-labourer, unlike slaves or servants who were part of an extended family. He eats carob pods – the food of animals and of the poor. While he is with the other-than-human creatures he experiences "coming to himself" (Lk 15:17), a Greek expression suggesting self-knowledge and an experience of realism. He resolves to go to his father.

There is a threefold pattern. First is an implied description of need. The father saw the son coming from afar. He knew the returning one was in a danger. In failing to "honour father and mother", his son had severed communal relationships and was risking the villagers' anger. Second, the father is described as "having had a heart moved with compassion" (*splagchnizomai* cf. Lk 10:33). This

expression, meaning being moved from the depths of one's being, echoes womb-compassion (*rahahim*) which comes from the Hebrew word for womb (*rehem*).

Third, something must be done to address the heartfelt need. Throwing dignity aside the father runs towards his son and receives him home. The welcome is extravagant in all its details. Many companions join the father at the celebratory table as suggested by the killing of the fattened calf.

However the elder son is bitter and alienated over having "slaved for you" and his relationship with the younger son is not restored. The tragedy of the elder son is that he does not see his position of privilege, blessing and relationship.

The pattern of hospitality in these "lost" parables evoking God's mercy is given flesh by Jesus' insistence that the poor and outcast are welcome as his table companions. Australian biblical scholar, Francis Moloney, in *A Body Broken for Broken People*, outlines the Eucharistic practice of the early Church. He shows that the early Church believed that Jesus gave the Eucharist in a context of weakness, betrayal and denial – his body is broken for a broken people. When revising his book in 2015, Moloney added the subtitle, *Divorce, Remarriage, and the Eucharist*. In it he suggests we need a responsible examination of the Church's pastoral practices around who is invited to be Jesus' table companions. ■



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A MAN with an AMAZING PLAN



The Tax-collector's Office
by Pieter Brueghel the Younger
[Google Art Project]

KATHLEEN RUSHTON writes that by misjudging Zaccheus in Luke 19:1– 10 we miss his vision for a better community.

For about four months, the Sunday gospels this year are from Luke's account of the journey of Jesus and his disciples from Galilee to Jerusalem. This journey begins in Lk 9:51 when Jesus "sets his face to go Jerusalem." We are reminded they are "on the way" (Lk 9:56, 57; 10:38, 13:33), "on the way to Jerusalem" and passing through villages (Lk 9:52; 10:1; 13:22, 31). After leaving the Jordan River, Jesus was passing through the oasis town of Jericho (Lk 19:1) where there was one of the many palaces King Herod had built. From there, these travellers would begin their 27 kilometre ascent through the wilderness to go up to Jerusalem.

The first part of the travel narrative focuses on the qualities Jesus demands of those who follow him (Lk 9:51–14:33). The "gospel within the gospel" of Luke 15 is at the centre, followed by the second part which contains stories found only in Luke and sets out some of the obstacles which face those who follow Jesus. (Lk 16:1–19:10). This section ends with the story of Zacchaeus.

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Who was Zacchaeus?

Zacchaeus, we are told, "was a chief tax collector and he was rich". All is not what it seems to be. A clue is indicated by Zacchaeus's name which comes from a Hebrew word meaning "clean, pure, innocent." Biblical scholar, John Pilch, suggests that this story is about "Mr Clean, Mr Pure, Mr Innocent" – which is intriguing.

This story comes, as do all the gospel stories, from a world very different from modern western society. What we call economics, and how we understand economics, is very different from the ancient world. People believed that everything of value already existed, was limited in supply and was distributed already. Against this background "the poor" described people like widows and orphans who had fallen temporarily from their rightful place. A widow's status could be restored through re-marriage and an orphan's through adoption or when they grew into adulthood. "The rich" according to one understanding, were those who did not have to work for a living. And of course, "rich" could also mean greedy. Was this so with Zacchaeus?

30 October: 31st Sunday of Ordinary Time

Chief Tax Collector

The narrator describes Zacchaeus as a chief tax collector. At this time under Imperial Rome some local people and some cities contracted with the Roman administration to collect taxes for them in allotted areas. The contractors had to pay their areas' taxes in advance and then set about collecting taxes with the hope of achieving a profit. In this rather risky business, chief tax collectors employed tax collectors to do the work. Tax collectors, including Levi who was known as Matthew, are found throughout Luke (3:12; 5:27, 29, 30; 7:29, 34; 15:1; 18:10, 11, 13).

Some tax collectors gathered direct taxes which were levied on land, crops and individuals. Others collected indirect taxes, such as tolls for crossing bridges, duties at markets and for goods and services. Tensions arose between collectors and those taxed. Few of these collectors would have been rich. However, some chief tax collectors would have been. There would have been honest and dishonest collectors. Those who watched the interaction between Jesus and Zacchaeus "began to grumble" because they assumed Zacchaeus was a sinner.

Zacchaeus's Actions and Words

Short Zacchaeus "was trying to see Jesus" (Lk 19:3) and is unaware he is being sought (LK 19:5). He hurries down from the sycamore tree and welcomes Jesus. The word for welcome links him with Martha who receives Jesus as a guest (Lk 10:38); Simeon who receives the child Jesus (Lk 2:28) and those who receive the word of God (Lk 8:13; 9:48; 10:8;18:17). Zacchaeus responds with joy to Jesus, as do those others.

In contrast to when Jesus tells a parable to defend the woman who anoints his feet, Zacchaeus defends himself (Lk 19:8). As he leads Jesus and his disciples to his house, Zacchaeus literally "stood", stopping all movement forward, to deny publicly the accusations against him. First, he speaks in the present tense, not in the future tense as it is translated in English: "Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor." The present tense in Greek has the sense of a repeated, ongoing practice.

Second, Zacchaeus uses a conditional clause: "If I have defrauded any one" which does not mean he has defrauded anyone consciously but if he discovers he has defrauded someone, he has an amazing plan. He will restore "fourfold," that is, 400 per cent.

Jesus declares Zacchaeus "a son of Abraham" and as belonging to the reign of God for: "Today salvation has come to this house" (Lk 19:9). These words echo those at the beginning of his ministry when Jesus declares that "today" the prophecy of Isaiah (Is 61:1-2) was being fulfilled, and also Jesus' words to the dying thief: "Today you will be with me" (Lk 23:43).

Appearances are Deceptive

Zacchaeus, the rich chief tax collector, is perceived by the people to be corrupt yet he is found to be with those who follow Jesus by giving the poor what is rightly theirs (Lk 6:30-31, 38; 18:22) and by doing works of mercy (Lk 11:41; 12:33 *eleēmosunē*, derived from *eleos* mercy). In contrast, the pious, rich ruler perceived to have kept all the commandments, cannot sell what he owns and give to the poor (Lk 18:22). And lurking in the background are

the grumbling ones also in need of conversion. Is it I, too, the reader?

An Amazing Plan for Today

Zacchaeus's amazing plan to restore 400 per cent resonates with one of the radical challenges in Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* on *Care for Our Common Home*. Francis calls for a new global order in which the massive unpaid debts owed by the wealthiest, resource-greedy countries will be balanced against the development debts of the majority world. Francis describes the inequity that "affects not only individuals but entire countries". He speaks of "a true 'ecological debt' [which] exists between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances, with effects on the environment; and the disproportionate use of natural resources by some countries over long periods of time ... The developing countries, where the most important reserves of biosphere are, continue to fuel the development of richer countries" (LS par 51-52).

There is no room for the globalisation of indifference. Francis speaks of *differentiated responsibilities* regarding climate change. We in developed countries must limit consumption and pay our debts to poorer countries by supporting policies and programmes for sustainable development.

In contrast to the biblical world view of limited goods, outlined previously, the dominant world view today is underpinned by a global order of neoliberal capitalism, exploitation of resources and greed. Like Zacchaeus, who stood up and declared his stand, we need to take a stand, no matter how small we feel, and state how in our actions – using the present tense – we respond to the cry of the poor and the cry of earth and declare that we too have an amazing plan: "If I have defrauded anyone..." ■



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The Year of Mercy that began on 8 December 2015, ends on the feast of Christ the King, this month. During this Year we have contemplated and experienced the mystery of God's mercy, of being mercied (literal translation of "shall have mercy shown to them" Matthew 5:7) and discovered anew the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, including Pope Francis's eighth work, to care for our common home. The reading for the end of the Year of Mercy, Luke 23:35–43, has a significant two-verse dialogue between Jesus and another condemned person.

"With me"

"Then he (the wrongdoer) said: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied: "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23: 42-42). In this exchange in Luke's gospel we have the last words spoken by a human being to Jesus. And Jesus' last words to a human being in his pre-resurrection life. How we treasure the last words of one we love.

The wrongdoer is the first person with the confidence to address Jesus in familiar terms for nowhere else in any gospel does a person address Jesus as "Jesus." Elsewhere his name has qualifications suggesting reverence, for example, "Jesus Son of God" (Mark 5:7; Lk 8:28) or "Jesus Son of David" (Mk 10:47; Lk 18:38). Raymond Brown describes the wrongdoer as having "disciple-like spontaneity." Disciples are distinguished by their willingness to accept Jesus' invitation and to follow him spontaneously. However, the wrongdoer does not wait for an invitation. He anticipates the words of Jesus to disciples: "Ask and it will be given to you." (Lk 11:9).

This dying companion asks Jesus to remember him. And Jesus offers much more, for he not only saves but shows intimacy by including him as a disciple. At the last supper, Jesus says to the twelve: "You are those who have stood with me in my trials." Because of this he promises them that they shall eat and drink at his table in his kingdom (Lk 22:28–30). Jesus promises the wrongdoer that

he "will be with me." Being with Jesus, suggests he will share more than Jesus' company in paradise for like the twelve he will share in his resurrection. Jesus begins with "Truly (Greek text, *amen*) I tell..." which gives solemnity to that which follows. Nothing can separate Jesus' dying companion from God's loving mercy.

Luke Adds Hope

Luke reshapes the abandonment and rejection of the execution scene in Mark's gospel to one of hope and forgiveness. He inserts Jesus' prayer of forgiveness (Lk 23:34). The people who stood watching are contrasted with the religious leadership who scoff, the mocking soldiers and the other wrongdoer. They deride Jesus with variations of: "Save yourself." In contrast, "the other" (Lk 23:40) does not specify what "save" means. He owns his wrong-doing and acknowledges the justice of the punishment. His is the fourth acknowledgement of Jesus' innocence (Lk 23:40; 23:14, 15, 22).

During his trial Jesus is clothed by Herod and his soldiers in "a splendid (white) garment" which suggests his innocence (Lk 23:11). The word *lampros* meaning radiating or shining is translated as splendid, white, elegant or rich. Australian scripture scholar, Michael Trainor, suggests that Jesus died still clothed in this garment — Jesus is "accompanied to his place of death by Earth's wood and becoming transfixed to it; now he is clothed in Earth's linen."

Ancient Context

Luke calls those crucified with Jesus by a generic term meaning an evildoer, criminal or malefactor (*kakourgos*), which has an unambiguously criminal sense. We find this word three times: the two are led away to be crucified (Lk 23:32); they are one on his right and one on his left (Lk 23:33); and one of them derides Jesus (Lk 23:39). Mark and Matthew call them bandits or revolutionaries (*lestai*). Luke uses this word when Jesus protested at his arrest: "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit?" (Lk 22:52); when the Samaritan fell among bandits (Lk 10:30); and when

**YOU
WILL BE WITH
ME**

KATHLEEN RUSHTON reflects on the brief conversation between two dying men, Jesus and his companion, in Luke 23:35-43.

in cleansing the temple Jesus accused the sellers of making God's house into a den of bandits (Lk 19:46). Only John calls Barabbas a bandit.

Although crucifixion was used as punishment by many ancient peoples, there are very few descriptions and these come from Roman times. No ancient writer wanted to dwell on this cruel practice. In fact, the most detailed accounts are the gospel passion narratives. The frequency and the brutality of crucifixion as a tool of Roman oppression has been diminished by the tendency of Christians to theologise away its horrors, or particularise it to Jesus alone. This hideous form of execution threatened men and women. Men



are recorded as being punished by crucifixion (defeated armies, piracy, threat to male leadership) and 22 cases of women's crucifixion have been traced (violating the rights of a husband, sacrilege, child abuse, sorcery, extermination of a race/kinship group, punishment for abortion).

As Jim Considine points out in his recent article (*Tui Motu* Sept 2016:4-5), prisons are a recent phenomenon. Punishment of offenders at the time of Jesus was in the hands of those who could impose penalties as they saw fit. In the case of crucifixion, the caprice

Feast of Christ the King, 20 November

and sadism of executioners were given full rein. The emphasis was on shame and public humiliation. Burial, an act of piety for Jews, was denied as the body was left for scavengers.

Re-membering

What does the request of Jesus' dying companion mean for the Christian community today and for the condemned ones we call prisoners? Mary Rose D'Angelo says: "re-membering conveys together the ideas of bringing what has been hidden out of the shadows of history, of putting together what has been dismembered and of making someone a member of oneself, of a community or the tradition in a new way."

As death approaches, Jesus completes a final act of liberation which recalls his ministry declaration in the Nazareth synagogue: good news is given to a poor one, the captive is released and the oppressed one goes free (Lk 4:18-19). Jesus' emphatic "today" points to now and links this incident with moments of salvation or revelation in this gospel story (Lk 2:11; 4:21; 5:26; 13:23-33; 19:9; 22:34, 61).

What does this mean for us who live in a country with one of the highest rates of imprisonment in the developed world? Officially, the ministry to prisoners is through the Prison Chaplaincy Service of Aotearoa New Zealand (PCSANZ), which Churches formed to take responsibility for the appointment and management of prison chaplains under contract to the Department of Corrections. The Catholic Bishops Conference works closely with PCSANZ to provide Catholic Chaplaincy in all prisons. However, Corrections now defines chaplaincy in a much narrower role than previously, which means a funding decrease.

James K. Baxter recommended: "Bail people out of jail, visit them in jail, and look after them when they come out". We need to make our mainly middle class parishes into an environment in which released prisoners who had discovered their faith in prison would feel welcome, as long-serving prison chaplain, Mary Kamo said on her retirement.

The end of the Year of Mercy reminds me of words I found at the end of my Camino pilgrimage: "The end is the beginning". The end of the Year of Mercy is a new beginning of seeing and living through the lens of God's mercy. In Jesus' reply to his dying companion, God breaks into a situation that seems beyond mercy and hope. This is our encouragement. ■

Painting: *St Dismas the Good Thief* by Bradi Barth © www.bradi-barth.org
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Kathleen Rushton RSM tends her vegetable garden, walks in the hope her feet will allow her to tramp again and delights in learning about Scripture.

A LIFE-CHANGING JOURNEY



KATHLEEN RUSHTON interprets Matthew 2:1-12 reflecting on the Magi's visit to the newly-born Jesus in Bethlehem.

The feast of the Epiphany, also known as the Twelfth Day or Twelfth Night, was established by the end of the second century and celebrated long before the feast of Christmas. As well as the feast, the term "epiphany" is used of a moment when one feels suddenly that one understands, or becomes conscious of something important, triggered by new information, which allows a leap of understanding.

I was waiting to pay a traffic fine at a local Westpac Bank. Inside was a large, shiny, red, upmarket version of the humble farm-bike with a placard exhorting people to take out

Painting: Leonardo da Vinci's unfinished *The Adoration of the Magi*.

an easy-to-action loan to purchase this \$9,800 +GST vehicle for a Christmas gift. Another poster gave a financial countdown to Christmas: if paid fortnightly – so many pay days to go. Two recent experiences highlighted just how distorted the meaning of Christmas has become. First was participating in the "Reverse Greed: Heal the Earth" series, which included a seminar on banks. The second was my research on banks that invest in fossil fuels. The bank's "gift" loans land people in debt and embed consumerism in our society. Further such loans bolster Westpac's profits, which despite their claim to be leading in sustainability, are heavily invested in fossil fuels and bankrolling new coal mining ventures (*Fossil Free Banks Report* 350.org.nz/).

In light of the above we can look carefully at Leonardo da Vinci's unfinished painting, "The Adoration of the Magi", commissioned by the monks of San Donato a Scopeto, Florence, in 1481. In the foreground many people surround the baby Jesus. In the background behind Jesus, Mary and the Magi are crumbling buildings and men fighting on horseback. Da Vinci captures elements of Matthew 2:1-12 which other artists miss: Jesus the Messiah comes into a world of chaos and decay which needs change. What would we paint into the background to sketch the context in which we tell the story of the Epiphany today? How might our reflection during this Christmas season lead us more deeply into *whakawhanaungatanga*/making right relationship happen with Atua/God, tangata/people and whenua/land?

Geography and Time

In Mt 2:1, we find Jesus' birth notice and an introduction to the characters. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, an insignificant village, about eight kilometres south of Jerusalem, the centre of power. Bethlehem was the ancestral home of David and was where he was anointed king by the prophet Samuel. Jesus, son

Feast of the Epiphany
Sunday 8 January

of David (Mt 1:1, 17, 20), was born there “in the days of King Herod.” At this stage in the story we are given no information about Herod. However it is well-known he was a puppet of Imperial Rome and was notorious for his cruelty, political skill and massive building projects. Then the word “behold” (also used in Mt 1:20, 23) turns our attention to “Magi from the East [who] came from Jerusalem.”

The Magi

The most accurate way to name the visitors from the East is to call them “Magi”. To use “wise men” is too wide a term, “kings” is incorrect and although “astrologers” is nearly correct, it is confusing because of the meaning of that term today. The Magi were a high-ranking, priestly class of political-religious advisors who served the rulers of Media and what later became the empires of Persia (approximately the areas of modern Iran and Iraq). While they had access to the centres of power, they were sometimes seen as a threat to royal power because of their influence in predicting future events and their astrological knowledge. They were regarded as being able to recognise the signs of the times. The Magi from the East were Gentiles and they did not know the Scriptures. However they had alternative ways of knowing – the mystery of a star to find Jesus, and dreams to “take a different way” to avoid Herod. Matthew is highlighting that all do not come to Jesus by the same way. God uses unexpected means. This sets up what recurs in Matthew – Jesus, Israel’s King, is recognised and welcomed by the least expected people.

The Magi come from Jerusalem, the centre of Jewish history and tradition, which in Matthew’s gospel is the stronghold of the corrupt political power and authority of the Jewish leaders. It does not stand for the whole Jewish people. There is a powerful/powerless contrast throughout Matthew – the lowly receive Jesus (his parents, the twelve) and the powerful reject him (Herod, Pharisees, Scribes, Pilate). Frightened that the Magi were seeking the new-born King of Jews, Herod calls in the Jewish leaders, who were colonised and subservient to Rome, to interpret the Scriptures. According to the prophet, a ruler will be born in Bethlehem of Judea (Micah 5:2).

“To Shepherd My People”

Herod sends the Magi to Bethlehem with instructions to bring him word when they had found the child. Setting out they saw the star ahead of them and followed it until “it stopped over the place where the child was.” Jesus is not named but referred to as “the child” for the first of eight times in this chapter. This is significant, for in that cultural world often children were viewed with suspicion and seen as a threat to adult male civic order. They were weak, vulnerable and marginal, as are Jesus and the children massacred (Mt 2:15, 18) in the face of the murderous power of Herod.

“Overwhelmed by joy” (Mt 2:10) when the star stopped, the Magi entered “the household” – not a stable or cave as the shepherds do in Luke’s gospel. The Magi’s actions of prostrating themselves, paying Jesus homage, and “opening

their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh”, evoke many Scripture references. They include the Gentiles’ journey to Jerusalem to worship God (Mic 4:1–2), or the king as representative of God’s justice (Psalm 72:10–11). The coming of the Gentiles is part of the vision of God’s justice being restored on earth (Isaiah 60:14). On such journeys, Gentile kings bring gifts (Ps 72:10). Yet Matthew subverts these biblical traditions, for kings like Herod do not come to worship or welcome Jesus. Rather than the kings themselves, the marginal Magi, advisors of kings, come. And they come not to Jerusalem or the Temple but to insignificant Bethlehem. Rulers of this world, too, assemble against God’s anointed One (Ps 2:2). In Mt 2:6, the new-born king will be a ruler who is “to shepherd my people Israel” (Mic 5:2), which suggests a very different model and function of power.

Gold from the seams of the Earth, frankincense and myrrh (made from tree resin), are the gifts placed before Jesus. How practical such gifts are is not the question. The Magi give what they have. We bring gifts too. What gifts do we place? What “star” guides us? Having met Jesus, will we now take “a different way” and *whakawhanaungatanga*/make right relationship happen with Atua/God, tangata/people and whenua/land? ■



Kathleen Rushton RSM tends her vegetable garden, walks in the hope her feet will allow her to tramp again and delights in learning about Scripture.



YEAR OF MERCY

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