

Sermon Series—Women in the Bible

Mark 14:3-9

Philippians 2:5-11

The unnamed woman

In our sermon series over the last few weeks we have looked at women in the Bible, And today I would like to do a little recap of our journey do far. To perhaps consider what we have learned about the Bible from our examination of some of the women in it, and what we have learned about God.

I am sure most of you know the bible is not one but 66 different books, almost entirely written by men, over almost two thousand years translated and retranslated almost entirely by men and taught by a priesthood who were also, until recently at least, men. Some of us may disagree on the source of scripture but I for one see the signature of a degree of human frailty in elements of the Bible. To me the Bible shows evidence of a patriarchal world, not just in the stories it contains but in the way it is written. Now if you believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God you may well be gasping at this point, but catch me afterwards if you want to disagree with me.

So we need to read the Bible carefully, take into account the context of the original authors and the intended readers, and understand that the way we read it now is often very different from those who did so nearly two thousand years ago.

Women of this period were often seen as chattels, a prop-

erty to be possessed , even allowing for the effect of Rome and its more liberal views on the equality of the sexes Jewish culture was largely ruled by Jewish men for the benefit of Jewish men.

It is this which has allowed the Bible to be used in the past to subjugate a whole range of people, including women. We need to be honest about this, its not only possible, its extremely easy because all kinds of bigotry are evident in some of its pages.

The great theologian Augustine said the Bible ‘was a faithful mirror with no flattery’, in other words it reflects us back, warts and all. So we should not be surprised to see so much of the worst of us in it.

So bearing all that in mind, what of the women of the Bible, and what specifically of the unnamed women?

Well the King James Bible contains around eight hundred thousand words and of those only ten thousand are spoken by women.

There are three thousand two hundred and thirty seven named individuals in the 66 books, although confusingly many of those could theoretically be the same people as so many share names. For example there are fifty one people called John and 31 Zacharias. But the vast majority of them are men, I think you get the point.

And yet in our sermon series we have seen there are strong women who have utilised what resources they had to be instrumental in God’s big story.

Although it often feels like women are marginalised by the male authors, even they cannot suppress the reality of in-breaking of the kingdom in the accounts we read, even though the original authors may have sought to tell one story what is actually writ large is another: God's redemptive story. And time and again it is women who feature prominently in it particularly in the life of his son here on earth.

From Mary the Mother of Jesus, a frightened teenager is chosen by God to kick off the story of Jesus and her 'Yes' to motherhood is the biggest human word ever spoken, through Mary and Martha who recognise the Messiah and are two of only three people named as Christ's friends, to the women who first discover the empty tomb and meet the risen Jesus. Despite the best efforts of some it is women who loom large in the Bible.

When John gives the genealogy of Christ astonishingly he often names women in it, not just men. Fallen women, foreign women, poor women.

It is the very nature of things like the accounts of the women in the Bible which convince me of its truths of scripture, its not some polished PR document, it's a warts and all story of a nations evolving encounter with God. Frail and often fallible men thought they were writing one story, but God had other plans and as we read it today we can see God's fingerprints all over it.

And so what of the unnamed women in particular? Well these nameless and faceless individuals are in some respect

the most astonishing of all aren't they. We heard from Chris about unnamed women who had suffered years of bleeding she whose faith told her to just reach out and take hold of the hem of Jesus clothes, to cling on to Jesus was all she needed to do, in her suffering and her desperation. How much is that a message for all of us.

We read in the papers of Christians who feel embarrassed to speak of their faith at social events? And then we hear our account today of unnamed woman two. Her courage to enter a house full of self righteous men and simply anoint Jesus, to give everything she had, to risk possible abuse and humiliation just to sit at the feet of Jesus. That is faith.

We will never know the names of these two, or the names or stories of all of the unnamed, just like billions of women around the world today, whose faces we never see and whose stories we will never be privileged to hear.

But two things we can be certain. Jesus knows them and counts them as his friends.

And their lives, like all of the women of scripture are making a difference.

Our prayer for us today is twofold. Let's keep looking for God's fingerprints in our faulty world, and let's be sure named or unnamed we are making a difference and we matter to God.