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Wellington Cathedral Receives a Precious Gift

By Revd Erice Fairbrother

On a cold Wellington evening, a small group of women made their way to Evensong at Wellington Cathedral. I was one of that group who were invited by Bishop Penny to be present when she gifted her beautiful wooden crozier to the Cathedral.

When Penny was elected Bishop of Dunedin, the Wellington Christian Feminist Group, under the inspiration and guidance of Judith Dale, had a crozier made. It was presented to Penny as Bishop-elect at a Women's Party in the Newtown Methodist Centre in Wellington. The Women's Party drew women from all over the North Island and reflected the significance we felt at the election of the world's first diocesan bishop happening in our church and that she was one of us.

In contrast, the gifting of the crozier into the safe-keeping of Wellington Cathedral was small, a collection of those of us who were still around and had been there at the Party in 1990. The picture of we women standing with Penny as she gave the crozier to Dean Frank Nelson, catches us as we were singing – May the Road Rise to Meet You. We had similarly walked (unscripted!) up the centre aisle of Dunedin Cathedral as she was pronounced Bishop and surrounding her,



Bishop Penny Jamieson & Dean Frank Nelson at Wellington Cathedral

sang that same blessing. It brought tears to our eyes the first time. They misted our eyes this second time.



Loyal friends supporting Bishop Penny Jamieson at the presentation of the gift of her crozier to Wellington Cathedral

It was very special to be there, to meet up with those who could make it and to remember those who could not. After evensong concluded, we wandered over to the Backbencher for dinner with Ian Jamieson, and their daughter Eleanor. A low key evening marking part of a greater milestone – for how we women leave what we have held, becomes the marking place where others who follow, can find their own beginnings - beyond our memories and yet also, because of them.



Kauhau: Mary of Egypt

By Megan Herles-Mooar

On the 24th August, just a few days following the State Funeral and burial of The Right Revd Sir Paul Reeves at St John's College, Megan Herles-Mooar delivered this sermon at the College's Community Worship on a little known and celebrated woman of faith.

May the Words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight oh Christ my hope and my redeemer.

As we've welcomed back a revered ancestor in Sir Paul, who rests and settles into the earth beside us, old stories have been revealed, and stories new, formed in this time, we're reminded not only of the stories he has shaped, but of the stories that shaped those before him, and back, and back, and back into our faith ancestry.

Through Scripture and in the stories of our Church ancestors, those seemingly disconnected from us, whisper across time, their experiences shaping, teaching us, professing a faith that shapes our understandings of God, Church, and each other. Through these ancestors in faith, we find ourselves to be strangely aligned with old words - still fresh in meaning and import.

For me it is this woman, my ancestor, and yours, Mary of Egypt, who time after time, calls me back from pride and self doubt turning me again to face God. Her life provides me with a road map that allows me to see and understand my place within this family of faith.

If we'd known Mary as a child, I suspect that the polite people amongst us would have described her as precocious, and the honest... as a bit of a spoilt brat. She grew up over 1500 years ago in a wealthy family in Alexandria in Egypt, over indulged, but schooled thoroughly in the Christian faith. At 12 Mary decided to be an actress running away to join the theatre. Such was the shame in her joining such a scandalous profession, that Mary was written out of her family's genealogy - and into ours, her name no longer spoken in the family home.

Young, beautiful, vivacious, it wasn't long before Mary began plying her trade as a prostitute, shocking many by attesting to an insatiable desire. However, increasingly these desires were being used to cover up the emptiness that was growing in Mary, as she began to be plagued by a sense of her own spiritual barrenness. The once faithful child, separated from God and family, now responded to her own self hatred by deliberately plying her trade along the pilgrim routes, bringing down those she saw as having a connection with God.

Such a life can't be lived without crisis, and for Mary it came soon after she turned 17 when she followed the pilgrims who went to celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. Mary followed the crowds into Jerusalem to the chapel of the Holy Sepulchre. Driven by need and rage, Mary who found bringing down holy men superficially satisfying, saw this as nothing compared to what she could achieve, in punishing the God who had abandoned her, by plying her trade in the chapel itself. But just as Mary went to enter the church, she was driven back by the visitation of an angel with a flaming sword. Try as she might, she could not enter. As she stood frozen at the threshold, the full knowledge that it was her own self that prevented her entrance, the sinfulness of her life that held her captive outside the church, filled her, twisting her, to her guts. Curled up in an alleyway, the consequences of her actions returned with full force, the absence of God leaving her screaming without voice.

Mary knelt in the dirt, and prayed to her name sake Mary the Mother of God, to help her find her way back to the Father. Mary remembers it like this:

"praying, I begged forgiveness and sought entry into the church. A great terror came over me, I trembled all over, but when I came to the door which until then had been closed to me, it was as if the force that had prevented me from entering, now allowed me to go in. I was admitted without hindrance, and went into the holy of holies and I was found worthy to worship the mystery of the precious and life-giving Cross. Thus, I understood the promises of God and realized how God receives those who repent."

Through the grace of God, Mary's story is liberated from one where she is cast for eternity in light of her sin.

Guided by the vision of the Mother of God, Mary leaves Jerusalem for the desert, but not before baptising herself in the River Jordan, and administering the Eucharist to herself in pilgrim chapel. Then entering the desert she walks until she sees no others, but God.

I often wonder what it was like for her on that first night, her only protection her re-acquainted faith, the madness of her aloneness pressing in.

I ask you to join me in the responses, Lord have mercy and Christ have mercy -

Lord I ache
I denied you for so long
for my face that turned away,
Lord Have mercy

Kauhau: Mary of Egypt *continued*

Lord it's me
I cut of my hair for you, but I am torn
If you come to me now, how will I wash your feet?
For my vanity
Christ have mercy
Christ have mercy

Lord last night
I dreamt I came to you...
but awoke to myself
reminded a thousand times of my presumption,
for my sin
Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy

Lord I screamed today,
heard my voice bounce of valley walls
I called your name
But all I heard, was me
Saying too much
Saying too loud
I cover my mouth
Weak in my will
Christ have mercy
Christ have mercy

Lord I begged for food today
I ate crickets and old fruit,
Thought of you and fell down
If I could stop the rumbling below
Maybe that which is underneath
The dark me
The raging me
The terrified broken me—unacceptable in your sight
may disappear
But instead she just aches to be before you
For that which I have kept hidden
Powerful Lord
Vengeful Lord
Graceful, Loving, Laughing
Lord Have Mercy
have mercy,
For just a moment in this magnificent day
Have mercy.

It would seem that the story of our ancestor is destined to end here lost in the desert, indeed it's not for some 47 years that we hear of her once more, through the unlikely source of an erudite monk Zosimas.

Whereas Mary had been driven to the desert plagued by feelings of extreme unworthiness, Zosimas; having lived an exemplary life of monastic spirituality, was struggling with the notion that he had achieved perfection. Captivated by his own story of holiness, God sends an angel to assure Zosimas that no man, least of all he, is perfect, and directs him to leave the security of the monastery for the desert, where he may know and understand *hu miccle synd hælo wegas* ("how many are the ways to salvation").

Zosimas sets out determined to find a spiritual mentor, deep in the desert however, he is met by a demon. Imagine this moment Zosimas terrified is confronted by a naked sun burnt skeletal figure, furiously he crosses himself warding off the demon who, horrified hides, calling him by name, "Zosimas...Zosimas". In that moment Zosimas knows he has found his teacher, not a learned Father of the desert, but a wild woman, he chases the now fleeing figure whom he finds hiding ashamed of her nakedness behind a rock. Zosimas places his robe near so she may cover herself and in a moment poignant, Mary steps forward and each kneels before the other, she asking for his blessing, to which he replies, "O Mother in the spirit, it is plain that all your life you have dwelt with God and have nearly died to the world... But since grace is recognized not by office but by gifts of the Spirit, bless me, for God's sake, and pray for me out of the kindness of your heart." And so Mary blesses Zosimas.

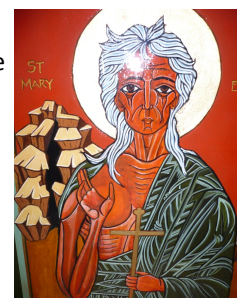
In the days that follow, Zosimas' world is turned on its ear. In her presence he experiences miracles and wonders, but none as great as her own story of suffering, grace and reconciliation in the desert. He leaves renewed in faith returning a year later with that which she most desires the Eucharist, on the last day of his second visit with a rock as a table, they partake in the mystery which we too will soon enter into. The third time he returns however, it is to find his beloved mentor dead. Her sun parched body resting in the place he last saw her, a message carved into the ground speaks of her passing hours after receiving the Eucharist the previous year. Kneeling, Zosimas weeps, as he begins long task of scraping out a shallow grave he is joined by a lion which silently paws at the ground beside him.

The legacy of these our ancestors is not lost however, Zosimas tells of his teachings and the impact, of Mary's story of embodied faith and the forgiveness of God, travels from monastery to monastery, the threads of both of their teachings transforms theological education, becoming enmeshed in the story of the Church. Such teaching, that reinforces the Gospel message, travels through Europe, across time and down... down... down through the generations of our spiritual forebears. Until the spirit of the message, if not the names are remembered through out the world.

Last week we welcomed back a revered ancestor in Sir Paul, who rests and settles into the earth beside us, and today we remember the life and witness of Mary and Zosimas all three of these our ancestors in faith wait in the arms of God, wondering perhaps what legacy we will leave and what our role will be in witnessing to those yet to come, as to the redeeming grace of God. This place is alive with story.

What is your story? What is the legacy you're leaving? Scripture leaves you a legacy retelling a story that helps us respond to God. Through these stories we've come to understand ourselves, and our Church, in new ways. As people of the Book, stories are not new to us, in scripture we break open the stories that shape and nourish our faith.

This icon of St Mary of Egypt was painted by Megan Herles-Mooar who is part of an icon painting group at St Johns College



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The Centre for Anglican Women's Studies, commonly known as the **Women's Studies Centre** was set up to serve and to advance the interests and needs of the women of this Church particularly those undertaking Theological training.

PASTOR & PROPHET HUI
Women in Ordained Ministry
27-29 October 2011

The Link Representatives from each Diocese and Hui Amorangi have been chosen for their leadership ability to identify, gather, facilitate, resource and encourage women in their educational preparation for ministry whether lay or ordained. It is hoped that the Women's Studies Centre can continue to enjoy the support of each Diocese and Hui Amorangi in this endeavour.

The issue of increasing numbers of women in representative positions across the councils and committees of the Church is seen as a high priority and the practice of intentional mentoring by those already in national and international representative roles is seen as a good way to expose women of this church to fulfill their potential as leaders.

Ensuring that women's voices and stories are heard now and in the future is also one of our continued aims whether it be by traditional methods of publication or using more contemporary technologies like website publication. We remain optimistic that through continued support, the needs of women throughout this Province will be valued and recognized.



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