

St Andrew's Chesterton

'#Me too'

A sermon preached by Nick Moir on Easter Day 2018

Harvey Weinstein was top of the film world. He had been the producer or executive producer of hundreds of major movies, including *Shakespeare in Love*, *Gangs of New York*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *The English Patient*, *Good Will Hunting*, *The Cider House Rules*, *Chocolat*, *Iris*, *The King's Speech*, and *Paddington*. In October last year it was reported that more than a dozen women were accusing him of sexual harassing or raping them. Following that publicity many other women came forward with similar accusations. Though he denied any non-consensual sex, his wife left him, his production company fired him and the British and American Film Academies expelled him. How are the mighty fallen. But the tidal wave of accusations against sexual impropriety swept against many others in the film industry and, indeed, all over the place. Women joined in via social media and a #MeToo campaign.

Women, until recently, comparatively invisible in the blokish worlds of power and influence have found a voice. The fear that had silenced them for so long has been overcome as, in solidarity with other women, that have named some evils that have been oppressing them and stood up to the malign use of sex as an instrument of power. For that is what this is all about: it's not really about sexual misconduct; it's about the use and abuse of power - powerful men exerting their power and using fear as a means of silencing and gagging their victims.

Reading the passion story in this past week as told by Mark and John I have been struck by the key role of women in the story. Last week at our Palm Sunday Service we heard we heard of the poor widow who threw her last remaining copper coins into the temple treasury. Jesus noticed her and it was deeply moved by her generosity, as he was a chapter later by the woman who broke open her alabaster jar and poured over his head her exceedingly precious ointment of nard. She was told off by some of the men for being wasteful but Jesus was moved by an act of kindness and generosity done to him. The one who was to give everything for the world he loved and came to save and left us a little ritual to remind us of it - 'do this in remembrance of me' - sees what she does as also worthy of being remembered: 'Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.'

And then at the cross Mark mentions the women who were 'looking on from a distance':

'among them were Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.'

It was the women who stuck by him when the men failed him: Judas betrayed him, Peter denied him, the rest, Mark says, 'all forsook him and fled'.

But the women were there; they travelled with him, they stuck with him and by him in his hour of deepest need. Perhaps chief among them, alongside his mother, was one of the other Marys, the one known to us by her native city, Mary from Magdala. They've made a film about her this year; I haven't had the chance to see it yet but I think it's pretty faithful to the Mary we know about from the gospels, one who had been disturbed in spirit but who had found in Jesus one who brought her acceptance, healing, kindness and love - the opposite of the Harvey Weinstein effect. For Jesus did not play at love to exercise power; he gave up all pretensions to power to exercise love. And Mary witnessed all of that supremely in this week, when she saw him deliberately choose the way of the cross, the way of self-sacrifice, the way of powerlessness. It was not an easy decision: he sweated blood in Gethsemane before shedding it at Golgotha. All because with those outstretched arms he wished to draw people into what really matters in all the world, into the place of true healing and wholeness, into the love of God. And what that sacrifice evoked in Mary and those who first

responded to it was not fear but love. And of that message Mary was the first apostle, just as she had been the first to reach the tomb that Easter morning. She was first to speak with the Risen Lord and it was Mary who was first commissioned to go and tell, to be apostle, that is one sent by the Lord with his message. And she, as it were, pressed the button and sent the message, hashed MeToo – sent by a woman but received and retweeted by both women and men who found themselves telling a message, not the bad news of what a man had done to them, but good news of what a man had done for them. And it set off a train reaction as the message was retweeted and began to spread through the world.

And it's my message to you today - #Metoo. I know that this Jesus gave himself for me, for he loved me and died to set me free so that I need no longer be bound by sin and fear but can be bathed in love and grace like a precious ointment of nard poured all over me in kindness and generosity.

Have you received that good news? Can you say 'Metoo'? It's a hard thing to say in our age where faith has a pretty bad press and it's not easy being a Christian. And too often the church has tried to frighten people into faith but in doing so it not only abuses power but also betrays the very message we are supposed to be passing on. Metoo has to be a response of love to Love for it is Love, in the words of George Herbert, who bids us welcome.