Do you see this woman?

Meeting some women in the Gospels
Women and the Church

• Receives a great deal of attention today
• How does Jesus interact with women?
• If Jesus is inaugurating a new Kingdom then...
• Does that not mean a redefining of human relationships?
• Can we see that redefinition in his behaviour?
• To understand Jesus’ behaviour we must also understand something of the Middle Eastern social context
Some Old Testament background

• The Books of Ruth and Esther
• The story of Deborah the prophetess and Jael, the wife of Heber, (Judges 4 & 5)
• Proverbs 31:10-31
Ode to a Capable Wife

10 A capable wife who can find?
    She is far more precious than jewels.
11 The heart of her husband trusts in her,
    and he will have no lack of gain.
12 She does him good, and not harm,
    all the days of her life.
13 She seeks wool and flax,
    and works with willing hands.
14 She is like the ships of the merchant,
    she brings her food from far away.
15 She rises while it is still night
    and provides food for her household
    and tasks for her servant-girls.
16 She considers a field and buys it;
    with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.
17 She girds herself with strength,
    and makes her arms strong.
18 She perceives that her merchandise is profitable.
    Her lamp does not go out at night.
19 She puts her hands to the distaff, 
and her hands hold the spindle.
20 She opens her hand to the poor, 
and reaches out her hands to the needy.
21 She is not afraid for her household when it snows, 
for all her household are clothed in crimson.
22 She makes herself coverings; 
her clothing is fine linen and purple.
23 Her husband is known in the city gates, 
taking his seat among the elders of the land.
24 She makes linen garments and sells them; 
she supplies the merchant with sashes.
25 Strength and dignity are her clothing, 
and she laughs at the time to come.
26 She opens her mouth with wisdom, 
and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.
27 She looks well to the ways of her household, 
    and does not eat the bread of idleness.
28 Her children rise up and call her happy; 
    her husband too, and he praises her:
29 “Many women have done excellently, 
    but you surpass them all.”
30 Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, 
    but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.
31 Give her a share in the fruit of her hands, 
    and let her works praise her in the city gates.
Sirach (Book of Ecclesiasticus, 집회서)

• “Do you have a wife who pleases you? Do not divorce her; but do not trust yourself to one whom you detest.” (Sir 7:26)

• “Where there is an untrustworthy wife, a seal is a good thing; and where there are many hands, lock things up. When you make a deposit, be sure it is counted and weighed, and when you give or receive, put it all in writing.” (Sir 42: 6-7)

• To son or wife, to brother or friend, do not give power over yourself, as long as you live; and do not give your property to another, in case you change your mind and must ask for it. (Sir 33:20)
Sir 42:12-14

• “Do not let her parade her beauty before any man, or spend her time among married women; for from garments comes the moth, and from a woman comes woman’s wickedness.  
  13 Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good; it is woman who brings shame and disgrace.”
The crucial question

• The position of women by New Testament times was, on all levels, inferior to men. Thus:

• Did Jesus (and, or, the New Testament) reinforce the attitudes toward women which were widespread in his time, or did he seek to reform them?

• Discovering Jesus’ attitude toward women is our joint task over the next 10 weeks

• Joint? I have my limitations!
The Song of Mary (the Magnificat) Lk 1:46-55

- No better place to start than with Mary, the mother of Jesus
- Her song, “the Magnificat”, breaks down into 2 sections:
  - personal (1:46-49)
  - communal (1: 50-55)
“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.” (Lk 1:46-49)
The Magnificat

- Structure of Section 1 (Scriptural sandwich)
- Praise, Salvation, Lowly -> Blessed (Exalted), Salvation, Praise
- Key verse or climax is in the middle (Mary is blessed/exalted)
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 

51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. 

54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.” (Lk 1:50-55)
The Magnificat

• Structure of Section 2
  • **Mercy** (to all who fear him),
  • **Salvation** (judgement),
  • **Humiliation** -> exaltation, **Exaltation** -> humiliation,
  • **Salvation** (judgement),
  • **Mercy** (to Israel)
The Magnificat

• What happens to Mary foreshadows what is happening to the believing community – *they too will be exalted out of their lowliness*

• Section 2, those who fear him (general) – Abraham and descendants (specific)

• Has 2 line structure – one line exalting, one line humiliating except for v.54 (aiding Israel/ opposing the Gentiles)

• No nationalistic attack on foreigners – something Jesus repeats in Lk 4:16-30, with his lack of vengeance on the Gentiles
He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”
20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.  
21 He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”  
22 All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.  
23 Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”  
24 “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown.
25 I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”
28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.
The Magnificat (a vision of the woman who raises Jesus)

• Presents a woman who has boundless compassion for the oppressed and a clear vision for lifting that oppression
• Mary is seen to be an intelligent woman, with strong opinions
• She knows that God blesses not just her ethnic community but all people of good will.
The Magnificat (a vision of the woman who raises Jesus)

• She has a radical vision of what the human community can look like.
• She is not interested in vengeance
• She is “raised up” (exalted) in her lowliness
• This extraordinary woman and mother must have had an enormous influence on Jesus
So how do we imagine Mary?
How did this impact on Jesus and his ministry?

• Jesus had women disciples! The word disciple is used in Acts 9:36 (i.e. Tabitha) in the feminine form: *mathetria*

• Matt 12:48-50 Who is my mother, who are my brothers? Stretch out his hand... In the context it must have been a mixed group
How did this impact on Jesus and his ministry?

• Lk 8:1-3 women are travelling with Jesus and supporting him financially (totally against prevailing culture). Luke admits this situation is astonishing
• Martha and Mary Story - Mary, sits at the feet of Jesus (Lk 10:38)
And shape Jesus’ message

• **Lk 4:25-27** – a foreign woman and a foreign man as models of faith (A widow from the region of Sidon; Naaman, the Syrian Leper)

• Patching clothes (women’s work) making wine (men’s work) presented together (Lk 5:36-39)

• “sees” the woman in the house of Simon (Lk 7:36-50)
And shape Jesus’ message

• A woman struggling with an indifferent judge – model of prayer (Lk 18:1-8)
• Divisions over Jesus include between men and women (Lk 12:51-53)
And shape Jesus’ message

- Mustard seed (farming) linked with making bread (domestic work) (Lk 13:18-21)
- Good shepherd and good woman presented together (Lk 15:3-11)
- Equality in the resurrection (Lk 20:27-36)
- A poor woman’s giving is praised (Lk 21:1-4)
- Women play a central role in the resurrection stories
Key points to ponder

• Woman like Ruth, Esther, Deborah and Judith were heroines. By the time of Jesus women were socially inferior (e.g. Book of Sirach)
• Mary, a brave and intelligent woman, clearly had an impact on Jesus
• Women were integral to Jesus’ band of disciples
Key points to ponder

• Jesus shaped his message to communicate to both the worlds of men and women
• Gospel stories continually elevate, “raise up”, women to a place of equality
Next week

• The Woman at the Well (Jn 4:1-42)

• https://ents.or.kr