

I said in an earlier video I would explain why this picture was a favourite of mine.



It's Scandale Pass at the head of Scandale valley.

I lived in Ambleside for a while and my Mother still lives there. It's a steep walk up out of the town to reach the Scandale valley but once you do it's usually a deserted place with a lovely long undulating walk until you get to the head of the valley and then it's a very steep climb up to the top of the pass. And at the top is a crossroads of paths just the other side of the wall and thus there is the ladder.

In the Wainright walking books – Scandale pass isn't a destination in its own right, it's a place on the way to somewhere else!



It speaks to me of an invitation. Of freedom. Of taking a risk. Of the unknown. When Jesus invites someone to "follow me" you have to step out in faith to follow not just once, but again and again because Jesus is interested in your freedom.

Freedom from the past and freedom from what restricts us now and freedom for the future. There was a time in my life when I wanted to experience more and what was restricting me was my own fears and anxieties that I had always lived with. I remember quite clearly praying that life would change and I would know more of God's grace in the future. The adventure that followed was deeply painful at times but ultimately the pathway of freedom. This ladder reminds me of that prayer and all that followed having the courage to climb up and over and go where God would lead.

This freedom that God gives isn't a licence to indulge, it's a freedom to become all that God knows we can be. Quite often we have to confront a painful truth about ourselves to break through to freedom.

The Gospel readings for this week are from John's Gospel and Monday was the reading Terry brought to us.

John 8 New International Version (NIV)

**8** <sup>1</sup>but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

<sup>2</sup>At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. <sup>3</sup>The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group <sup>4</sup>and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.<sup>5</sup>In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"<sup>6</sup>They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. <sup>7</sup>When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." <sup>8</sup>Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

<sup>9</sup>At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. <sup>10</sup>Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

<sup>11</sup>"No one, sir," she said.

"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Jesus is in the temple and in the authorities think they have him trapped. They bring in a woman caught in the act of adultery. There's something a bit News of the World about her description...not, that it was known she was in an adulterous relationship but "caught in the act". ,

It's almost as if they are revelling in how deliciously sinful the whole business is – caught in the act AND they have Jesus trapped, because the law of Moses was clear...she should be stoned to death so he can't contradict that and if he goes ahead he's in deep trouble with the Roman's who are running the show.

Jesus uses freedom in two ways. First...he gives them all the freedom to carry out the sentence but that the person without sin is to cast the first stone. V9 – *At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there.*

Jesus then speaks to the woman. Has no-one condemned you? And she says no. So Jesus doesn't condemn her either but gives her freedom to leave with one proviso – leave your life of sin.

Sin is always going to catch up with us – maybe not quite so publicly or in such a humiliating way, but all of us will account for the lives we've led...which will be awkward unless we too have been given freedom from the consequences of sin and for that we have Jesus Christ.

That though is just a start. Why did we sin? In what way are our lives restricted and less than they could be. Jesus Said "I have come that they might have life to the full" (John 10)

In this time of isolation there can be the temptation to fill the space, to keep busy and to feel worthwhile by being busy. Actually, it can be a gift. A bit of space to meet with Jesus and (if you have the courage to at least look over the wall) ask if there's anything he might like to straighten out.

If that sounds a little too personal and not quite how you do faith think of it this way. Until I asked a physio therapist why my knee was hurting from running I didn't realise I was hurting myself in the way I was running. Her advice put that right.

Look at the gentle way Jesus deals with the woman. No condemnation. No third degree as to why she ended up in an affair. Simply freedom and direction, go and sin no more.

I invite you to climb the ladder and look over. I've no idea what that will mean for you but God in his love and grace will gently bring to mind something that we can change to experience greater freedom.