

Jesus and the WI

Did Jesus enjoy jam making or wear a twin-set and pearls? Clearly not, but what this week has highlighted is that Jesus and the Women's Institute have more in common than you might think: they both expressed concern for prostitutes. And that concern was just as surprising in Jesus' day as the WI's concern might be for some of us today.

The WI want to make brothels legal in the UK, not to make things easier for men, but to make life safer for those women who live by prostitution. Prostitution is after all the world's oldest profession and given the reality of it, the WI are seeking to protect those involved as best they can. Neither Jesus nor the WI are saying that they think prostitution is a morally good thing. Far from it. What they are acknowledging however, is that there is a person behind the sin who deserves our compassion, love and concern.

Traditional views of both the WI and the Church might be that you need to be clean living, respectable and a pillar of society before you can become a member. Or worse, you must be these things before the Church or the WI will even take any interest in you. We may not necessarily agree with the WI's stance that brothels should be legalised, yet the attitude they display is one that we can learn from. This attitude is that the women involved in prostitution are human beings, made in the image of God no less and that they are worthy therefore of our care and attention. Furthermore, the WI are showing that we need to understand people, before we jump to judge them.

Whether the WI realise it or not, this is just the kind of compassionate concern that Jesus demonstrated. He invited the poor, the marginalised, the suffering and those that society would rather ignore into his Kingdom. The example he left us was one of acceptance, love, forgiveness and a desire to see all fulfil their potential in him. This doesn't mean that he considered what people were doing was always right; rather what was key was the way he responded. And just as this story may well change people's attitudes to the WI, so a greater familiarity with Jesus' actions – as we model them in word and deed – may also change peoples' attitude to him.