



## Love and inclusion: an Easter story.

**Through all the chaos of the Easter passion narrative of betrayal, denial, rejection, violence, terror, and despair there is a more subtle, and yet enlightening story; that of the many women who followed Jesus.**

While the male disciples are arguing about who is the most important (Luke 22:24ff), a woman had already been preparing His body for burial, anointing him with oil (eg. Mark 14:1ff). While Judas prepares to betray Jesus and Peter to deny Jesus (Mark 14), women such as Joanna continue to act as patrons, supporting Jesus financially, and will act as first witnesses of Jesus resurrection to the disciples, despite the disciples disbelief (Luke 24).

In all of this it is not the women's faith in Jesus, or the men's lack of faith that is crucial here; it is Jesus love and inclusion of each of them that is important for us to notice. This is the crux of the Gospel story – that by Jesus' death and resurrection all could be restored to relationship, including those who had been considered by society to be less worthy; Jesus elevates and celebrates them. He does this with children, with women, with people suffering from leprosy, with tax collectors, with prostitutes. And those who have lost their way, like Peter who denied even knowing Jesus, He restores to spiritual health.

While Easter is about Jesus it is helpful for us to understand that it was those who typically had no power or authority who lead the support network. The woman who anointed Jesus with oil was motivated by love, offering what she could in honour and service to Jesus. Martha offered her home, her sister Mary offered herself as disciple, Joanna her finances, Mary Magdalene her voice as witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Love and inclusiveness, giving back out of what they had been uniquely gifted with so that Jesus would be made known to the world.

May that be our call this Easter season. In a spirit of love and inclusiveness may we offer that which resonates most closely with the love of Jesus in our hearts and lives. It is through the diversity of gift and blessing, of abundant life that we remember and honour Jesus' death on the cross. Through His death we have new life. Jesus calls us to live this new life to the full, loving God and others with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength regardless of how the world might see us.

**"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."**

**— John 13:34-35**

202403



The Leprosy  
Mission  
Australia



International  
Women's Day  
March 8, 2024



**Your prayers emPOWHER  
young women like Renu to  
reach their full potential!**

**Keeping in Touch • Issue 3, 2024**

**Renu is 18 years old and lives with her parents and two young sisters. Her father drives a cycle rickshaw for income.**

Renu has been unable to go to school because of their financial situation. But thanks to compassionate shoppers of The Leprosy Mission Shop, she has trained in embroidery and sewing at the Advanced Skill Vocational Training Centre in POWHER.

POWHER Trust is a non-profit organisation created by a united team of social workers who dreamed to uplift and empower women and people with disability living in the slums of North Delhi. Their vision is:

"To empower the girls and women living in the urban slum communities and enabling them in leading a life with dignity, equality and development to their maximum potential."

Now that's "GIRL POWHER"!

Renu is now teaching at the Advanced Skill Vocational Training Centre and sews garments for herself and her sisters. Her embroideries are made into bags and other gifts to sell through supplier organisations like MESH (Maximising Employment to Serve the Handicapped). MESH is an Indian Fair-Trade organisation who work with artisans all over India to stock retail stores across the world – like The Leprosy Mission Shop, here in Australia.

The money Renu currently earns from her activities is helping her family to meet their needs and contributes to her sisters' studies. Both of her sisters are now studying in 11th grade. Praise God!

**Pray for girls and young women like Renu to be educated and trained so that they may find a way out of poverty through sustainable employment.**

**Pray for the organisations that help to empower women with leprosy and disabilities to reach their potential.**

**Pray for The Leprosy Mission Australia Shop to continue showcasing new artisans and producers, enabling them to lead lives of dignity and equality.**

**The Leprosy Mission Shop and their shoppers appreciate the work that goes into these delicately embroidered items and fine handmade pieces that keep artisans like Renu in employment. Many pieces are carefully hand-picked for each season's range – as you will see in the shop's catalogues.**

**shop to stop  
Leprosy**  
[shop.leprosymission.org.au](http://shop.leprosymission.org.au)





# Making a better world for all.



**March 8th is International Women's Day. A day to celebrate women's achievements, raise awareness about discrimination, and take action to make the world a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive place.**

From its beginnings 150 years ago The Leprosy Mission has recognised and valued the contribution of women in all aspects of its work, and part of the understanding that to defeat leprosy requires the empowerment of all people.

Today, one of the roles that builds on this history is that of Gender Officer. Amongst other things, this role helps ensure that projects are accessible to all people. It also raises issues concerning barriers to women with leprosy and disability. The Gender Officer helps elevate the potential of women and girls within diverse communities to find opportunities to contribute to the social and financial aspects of family and community life.

Sakshi is the Gender Officer for The Leprosy Mission Nepal. We asked her questions focusing on women's economic empowerment and the effect that has on them as individuals and as a community.

God give us the wisdom and courage to build a world in which each person, created in your image, is free to use the gifts you have given them. May we recognise the strengths and the potential of women to bring change, economic growth, and prosperity to their communities. May your will be done, here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

## What motivates you to work in the area of gender?

I am driven by the recognition of the significant impact gender equality has on society. Witnessing the disparities in opportunities and outcomes between genders, particularly in the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake, inspired me to contribute to fostering a more equitable world.

## Why do you think investing in women's economic empowerment is so important? How does this benefit society as a whole?

Investing in women's economic empowerment is crucial for multiple reasons. When women have equal access to resources, education, and job opportunities, it not only contributes to economic growth but also plays a pivotal role in poverty reduction. It also enhances social development by improving overall well-being within communities.

## How does the IMPACT (Integrated Mobilisation of People for Active Community Transformation) project support women's economic empowerment?

The IMPACT project focuses on several key aspects of women's economic empowerment. It includes skills training to enhance employability, facilitates access to financial resources such as credit and microfinance, and engages in advocacy efforts to promote policies that create equal opportunities for women in the workforce.

## What changes have you seen in the women who are given opportunities to start their own businesses?

Women who are given opportunities to start their own businesses often undergo transformative experiences. They exhibit increased confidence as they navigate leadership roles and overcome challenges. Financial independence becomes a tangible outcome, contributing not only to their personal growth but also to the well-being of their families.

(Here is an example. In KIT Issue 3, 2023 we met Mira. Mira had a lot of responsibility looking after a family of seven, including two with disabilities. She was very hesitant when we first met her and before joining a self-help group. Now she speaks in front of groups and has become the manager of the cooperative that evolved from the self-help group. This helped her grow income, access grants or gifts to help her son with disability and build up a network within her community. She is now a newly elected member of her ward, in reality a local politician!)

## What excites you when you see these women contributing and taking on roles they would never have considered in the past?

Witnessing women contribute and take on new roles is particularly exciting because it signifies a breaking of traditional gender stereotypes. These women become inspiring role models, challenging societal expectations, and contributing diverse perspectives to various fields. It fosters a positive cycle of innovation and creativity.

## What more needs to be done to bring about a gender-equal world?

Achieving a gender-equal world requires ongoing efforts across multiple fronts. Educational equality, equal employment opportunities, legal reforms protecting women's rights, and a cultural shift challenging gender

norms are all essential components of this journey. It's about creating a comprehensive framework that addresses systemic issues and promotes inclusivity in all aspects of life.

**Pray for Sakshi and other Gender Officers as they work to bring change through economic empowerment of women. Pray there will be a positive impact on communities as they grow and become more inclusive.**

**Pray that more women will access the IMPACT project and be encouraged by the possibilities that arise to think creatively about their future.**

**Pray for communities to be willing to see the importance of gender equality and to address the changes that need to be made to be a more inclusive place to live.**

**You can support the economic empowerment of women through the IMPACT project. The project supports women and men dealing with leprosy, disability, and poverty to develop sustainable livelihoods.**

**You can make a donation towards the IMPACT project using the response form enclosed with your paper copy of Keeping in Touch. Your gift can have 5 times the impact — if you give now, your gift is combined with a powerful government grant!**

**5:1 Matching Grant Approved**  
**YOUR GIFT IS WORTH 5 TIMES MORE!**

**You can also give online by following the link below, or scanning the QR code.**

**Donate to the IMPACT project!**

<https://www.leprosymission.org.au/projects/integrated-mobilisation-activecommunity-transformation>

