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A dead man suddenly came to life and began to pound on the lid of his coffin. The lid was raised and the man sat up: "What, on earth are you doing" he said to the assembled crowd. "I'm not dead". His words were met with awe and disbelief. Finally one of the mourners said. "Friend, both the doctors and the priests have certified that you are dead, so dead you are. They screwed the lid back down and he was duly buried.

As far as the smug Simon was concerned there was no way back for the women of ill repute. She was morally dead and that was that. The name 'Pharisee' means 'separated one'. By and large they didn't consider themselves as part of the common mass of sinful humanity. Jesus, on the other hand sees the innate goodness of each individual whatever their sins and failings. He was sent by the Father to seek out and save that which was lost. In this year of mercy I think we should keep this uppermost in our minds.

We hear a lot these days about social exclusion. Well Simon would have been adept at it. He'd have been mortified when Jesus allowed this woman of ill repute to shower Him with affection. By doing this Jesus wanted to show to Simon that God excludes no one from the ambit of His mercy. The woman is indebted to Jesus for pardoning her many sins. In no way is he condoning them.

But the Pharisee is not excluded either if he'd just put aside his 'I'm better than you' attitude. Nicodemus who sought out Jesus for advice and helped in taking Him down from the Cross was a Pharisee. He also provided the spices for his burial. The great St Paul was a Pharisee. When other early Christians wanted to exclude the gentiles, that is you and me, from becoming Christians, Paul the Pharisee stood up for us.

Do we ever pigeonhole people because of their moral failings or even peculiarities and thereby overlook to see the image of God in them. If people have sinned against society and their reputation has been taken down a notch or two, do we make it difficult for them to 'turn over a new leaf' by our harsh comments – most of which are probably wide of the mark anyway.

Jesus had time for this so called woman of ill-repute who turned to him. Simon would have preferred she disappeared. If we're honest with ourselves I'm sure there is a bit of Simon in all of us. But Jesus was gentle with him too as he will be with us. He didn't dislike Simon or else he'd hardly have come to dinner.

Our superior attitude can even make us capable of venting our anger against God. Some think it's high time for Him to sort things out by getting rid of all the so called bad people in the world. If that were the case what then would become of his patience and abundant mercy, which is there for anyone who asks.

It was sheeting it down with rain yesterday but before that there was quite a bit of sunshine. The Gospel tells us that God lets his rain fall and his sun shine on bad me as well as good. If HE doesn't discriminate against people whatever their moral standing, neither should we.