

FAITH & SUFFRAGE



A Bible Study



The Salvation Army
NZ, Fiji, Tonga & Samoa
Women's Ministries

for His Sake.

CELEBRATING
SUFFRAGE 130

‘For all that separates, whether of race, class, creed, or sex, is inhuman, and must be overcome.

KATE SHEPPARD



Did you know that the term ‘suffrage’ has two meanings? Intercessory prayer and the right to vote. But what do these two things have in common?

The root word is *suffragium*, which literally means a ‘voting tablet’. By the Fourth Century, the term suffrage was also being used to describe petitioning prayer, or ‘casting a ballot’ before God.

In this way, the very concept of being able to vote - being able to have a voice - has deep spiritual connections. God has given each one of us the right to cast our petition before him. In the same way, we are called to give each person the right to petition for themselves and have a say over their own lives.

There are three deeply Christian principles at work here:

1.

WE ARE ALL EQUAL BEFORE GOD

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'

GALATIANS 3:28

Kate Sheppard was a woman of deep Christian faith. She was the head of the Christian Women's Temperance Movement (CWTM) in Aotearoa New Zealand. They visited prisons, started kindergartens, held Bible studies, and advocated for many issues that affected women.

Under Kate's leadership, the CWTM fought for women's right to own property, and to increase the age of consent, which at that time was only 12. Most of all, they were passionate about restricting alcohol (which was known as 'temperance'). Alcohol abuse ravaged 19th Century New Zealand: water and milk were not safe to drink, so alcohol was seen as a 'necessity'. 'Drunken disorderliness' was the most common crime in New Zealand. This deeply affected the lives of women and children, who were at the mercy of their husbands: men who 'drank away' their wages left their families in poverty. Alcohol also fuelled domestic and sexual violence (as it does today).

Kate led a petition to parliament to ban ‘barmaids’ and the selling of alcohol to children. It was immediately thrown out. That’s when she had a lightbulb moment that would change the course of history: Kate realised that male politicians would never care about the issues that affected women, unless they needed women’s votes to keep them in parliament. And so, the campaign for women’s suffrage was born.



Questions

- ★ WHAT SIMILARITIES DO YOU SEE BETWEEN THE ISSUES KATE SHEPPARD WAS FIGHTING FOR IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND, AND THE ISSUES THE SALVATION ARMY WAS FIGHTING FOR AT THE SAME TIME IN THE UK?
- ★ WHAT CHRISTIAN BELIEFS FORMED THE FOUNDATIONS OF THESE MOVEMENTS?

2.

AS WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN MERCY, SO WE GIVE MERCY TO OTHERS

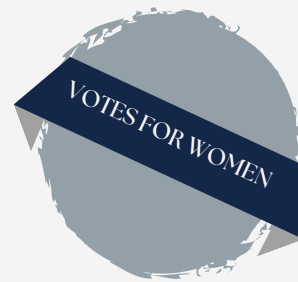
This is a profound truth that was intertwined throughout Jesus' teaching and life. Jesus intentionally reached out in mercy to the most maligned people: he touched the leper, he talked alone with a Samaritan woman, he literally got his hands dirty to heal a blind man, he had dinner with known tax thieves, he even allowed his feet to be dried with the tears of a 'sinful woman'. Ultimately, Jesus went to the cross in order to lift us all up and restore us to God. **We** are the maligned. It is to **us** that Jesus showed mercy.

Therefore, we are called to show mercy to others. Jesus even warns us that we cannot take part in the Kingdom of God if we don't treat others with the compassion we have received.

Read Matthew 18:23-31

This is one of many parables Jesus tells throughout his life, which describes 'what the Kingdom of heaven is like'. God is the King who shows his servant mercy by forgiving an insurmountable debt. But when the man meets a fellow servant who owes him a much smaller amount of money, he demands payment, even getting violent and choking his fellow servant.

So, what does this have to do with suffrage? If God has shown us such huge mercy and given us the right to petition him, how can we refuse another 'fellow servant' the right to petition, to have a voice, and to be given the same mercy we have received?



Questions

- ★ WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HOW DO WE REFLECT IT IN OUR LIVES?
- ★ HOW DOES THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT REFLECT THE KINGDOM OF GOD?
- ★ IMAGINE BEING IN NEW ZEALAND IN THE 1800S, WHEN WOMEN WERE FIGHTING FOR THE RIGHT TO VOTE. WOULD YOU HAVE JOINED THE MOVEMENT OR OPPOSED IT (BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF).
- ★ IT'S ALWAYS EASIER TO SEE INJUSTICE ELSEWHERE, BUT WHAT ABOUT OUR OWN LIVES? WHO ARE THE PEOPLE SUFFERING INJUSTICE TODAY? HOW AM I WORKING TO GIVE THEM A VOICE, OR HOW AM I (PERHAPS UNKNOWINGLY) SILENCING THEM?
- ★ HOW IS GOD CALLING ME TO SHOW SUFFRAGE OR PETITION ON BEHALF OF THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE POWER IN OUR WORLD?

3.

WE SUFFER, BUT WE ARE NOT CRUSHED!

On 19 September 1893, Aotearoa New Zealand became the first country in the world to give women the right to vote. It was a grand justice movement that rippled out from our motu to every corner of the world.

But what we easily forget is that Kate Sheppard and countless fellow suffragists worked tirelessly for many years in the face of defeat: legislation went to parliament three times and looked set to pass, only to be defeated each time at the last hurdle. In 1892, Kate Sheppard referenced Proverbs 13:12, in an article called 'Hope Deferred', where she shared her palpable disappointment:

To say that we are keenly disappointed, is a very feeble expression of our feelings. For fourteen years Woman Suffrage has been before the House of representatives, and for the past seven years has been in many ways brought prominently before the people of the Colony. It has undergone the treatment usually accorded to great reforms, which appeal to the principles of justice and equity, rather than to self-interest ...

... At first contemptuously brushed aside as an ill-timed joke, then treated with gentle and good-humoured banter, it passed through an ordeal of biting sarcasm and ridicule, and finally, as increasing numbers of men woke to the sense of justice of the movement, encountered fierce opposition, gross misrepresentation, and despicable trickery. Ridicule and insult have been freely heaped upon the women who dared to ask to be counted as citizens, instead of being classed on the statute-book amongst criminals, lunatics, and aliens. They have been accused of indelicacy, immodesty, have been accused of wishing to neglect their homes and unsex themselves, and, O Tempora! O Mores! It has even been said of them that they were strong-minded. For the benefit of posterity, we write it down here, that with some men, in A.D. 1892, the ideal woman is feeble-minded! To those who have toiled so long and arduously, this result is most disappointing. But though we may feel cast down for the moment, we are sure that the reaction will come. We have suffered numerous defeats, but each battle lost has given us a larger army."

KATE SHEPPARD,
THE PROHIBITIONIST
1892



FIVE YEARS AGO, THE
SALVATION ARMY CELEBRATED
SUFFRAGE 130 WITH THE
SLOGAN 'OUR WOMEN PREACH'.

Questions

Proverbs 13:12 says 'Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.'

- ✦ HOW ARE YOU FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE OR RAISING THE VOICE OF OTHERS? IS YOUR HOPE DEFERRED OR FULFILLED?
- ✦ HOW HAVE YOU ENCOUNTERED RIDICULE OR OPPOSITION AS YOU FIGHT FOR JUSTICE?
- ✦ HOW HAVE YOU (PERHAPS UNKNOWINGLY) RIDICULED OTHERS WHO ARE STANDING UP FOR JUSTICE?
- ✦ HOW DOES LOOKING BACK AT AOTEAROA'S SUFFRAGE STORY GIVE YOU HOPE FOR TODAY?

FINAL REFLECTION

2 Corinthian 4:7-11 (CEV)
'The real power comes from God and not from us. We often suffer, but we are never crushed. Even when we don't know what to do, we never give up. In times of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again. We face death every day because of Jesus. Our bodies show what his death was like, so his life can also be seen in us.'



SOURCES:

RNZ - WOMEN, THE VOTE AND EQUALITY
[HTTPS://GIVE KATE A VOICE.NZ](https://givekateavoice.nz)
NZ HISTORY: WOMEN & THE VOTE

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#OURWOMENPREACH



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Te Ope Whakapora

