

29. Vulnerable



Pandemic, racial and social injustice and the climate crisis are each playing their part in increasing the vulnerability of vast swathes of the world's population - domestically, educationally, economically, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually. Who is standing with them?

In Poussin's painting above (1653), we are in Jerusalem. There's a rumpus in the Temple. A woman has been dragged before Jesus by some religious leaders. Out to trap him, they ask for his advice. Should they stone this adulteress to death? John describes Jesus bending down to write in the dust under a barrage of accusatory questions. Then, "*Whoever is without sin can cast the first stone,*" he says (John 8.7). The men begin to slink away. Soon, Jesus and the woman will be alone. She'll start to breathe again.

Two vulnerable people are centre-stage. First there's the figure on her knees looking humiliated and intimidated. And no wonder. The accusers of this lone, disgraced woman are educated and influential men in a patriarchal world: they not only outnumber her but completely overwhelm her in the power stakes. Then there's the red-robed Jesus who, in standing with the woman, has seriously antagonised his adversaries. Those who act as voices for the vulnerable make themselves vulnerable. Speaking truth to power is costly.

Today...

...may we not only find you standing with us in our vulnerability but also, O Christ, have the courage to stand with others in theirs.

Amen