

Today we commemorate Margery Kempe, who lived from 1373 to c.1440. She was the daughter of a prosperous businessman in Kings Lynn, and was married to John Kempe. They had 14 children.

Margery lacked a formal education. She never learnt to write, and all her books were dictated to others. She was not a recluse, neither was she a submissive wife. She was highly emotional, could be incredibly rude (especially to senior male clerics), and would emotionally engage with the liturgy, all of which led to a distrust of her actions from established clergy, and a search for any heretical element in her sayings.

I like her already!

Margery experienced depression, possibly connected with the birth of her first child, and it was this depression that initiated a life of spiritual experience. Locked away in a room, forcibly restrained on the orders of her spiritual director, and suffering from depression, Margery saw a vision of Jesus, who said to her, 'Daughter, why have you forsaken me, and I never forsook you?'

This convinced her that both her guilt and fear were misplaced, and brought her into a personal and intimate relationship with Christ.

In 1436 Margery wrote *The Book of Margery Kempe*. It is essentially a spiritual autobiography. The book was written down by someone else, and edited, after much persuasion by a priest. Extracts of it were published in the sixteenth century, in a carefully edited edition. The discovery of the complete manuscript in 1934 led to a re-evaluation of the book and of Margery herself.

Margery is honest. She reveals her love of clothes, her envy of other people, her lack of scruples and her fantasies. Yet she is also honest in her dealings with her relationship with Christ. She finds in Christ a fulfilment she could find nowhere else, and this fulfilment leads her on a journey of gradual transformation.

Remembered initially as a mystic, Margery is now known to be a more complex and challenging character. Her achievements, despite all her failings, have often been met with puzzlement, or even hostility. At times overcome by joy, at others too honest for comfort, Margery is the embodiment of an honest soul on a quest for God.

She seems to me to be a person who can speak to us, especially women, in this century. She suffered from depression and this is something many of us can identify with at the moment. I would encourage you to read some more about her and you can find more here:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margery_Kempe

Let us pray

Loving Creator, we come to you today because we know that you are a God of love and compassion. We come seeking your presence, comfort and guidance. We come this day because we believe that you, Lord, love each one of us just as we are and you walk with us on our individual journeys through life. You see the ignorance and injustice that divides and separates persons struggling with mental illness and you weep with us.

Give us courage to face our challenges and open us today to the many ways you are already working in our midst. Help us to identify mental illness as the disease it is, that we might have courage and wisdom in the face of ignorance and stigma. Inspire us as we seek to overcome fear, acquire knowledge, and advocate for compassionate and enlightened treatment and services. We ask this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Alison