

Who leads the transformation

Vision: to recognise Jesus' calling for us to care for those who are judged and left out and explore how we can change our systems, actions and attitudes to release them to be transformed and to transform others

John 4: 1-19 - the woman at the well

Resource: Ask someone to read the monologue (over page) that tells the story from the woman's point of view, before answering the questions below. Ask for people's immediate emotional reactions to her story: what did they see, hear, feel?

Or show a video creatively telling the story: <https://youtu.be/w9os2-Hpdmc> (6 mins)

Questions to discuss:

1. How do you think the woman's neighbours look at her, given that she has had five husbands and is now living with another man?
2. At that time, women drew water together in the early morning or evening to escape the heat. Why do you think this woman went alone to the well in the heat of the day?
3. What role did the woman play in her community after her encounter with Jesus? How does this story challenge our attitudes and behaviours to those left out and judged?
4. Who do we judge as a church/ group/ individuals? Who feels isolated in our community like the woman in the story?
5. How can we change as individuals, church and community in our attitudes, actions and systems so that we welcome, include and release those who have been judged and left out into leading transformation?

Act of Love

Prayerfully reflect on Isaiah 61: 3b-4. Pray as a group and identify one person or group currently judged and left out. Choose an action to show them God's love and grace without judgement, as Jesus did in this story – or to improve our system as a church to include them.

Going deeper:

Do the 'Picture of participation' activity together (see last page) before you pray about your Act of Love. Focus on one of the groups you have identified as judged/ left out of our church.

Summary for facilitator:

Jesus treated people with love and respect, regardless of their past. He was never afraid to be seen with those that others despised. To follow his example, we must take deliberate action to ensure that everyone feels welcome, supported and able to contribute their skills. Everyone's past has a story behind it, and our place is to love, not to judge. Sometimes people are already pre-conditioned to expect rejection like the woman in this story. It is not enough to be friendly when we meet them: we have to find ways to overcome their past experiences, actively include them and to release them to help others in their community.

Monologue

"I wait behind closed shutters until the sun is at its highest point. Then I cautiously slip out into the sweltering noon heat. I am dripping with sweat in seconds. But as I glance round, I see that my timing has served its purpose. No one is around. No one to sneer, to cast knowing glances at me and whisper something to a friend. No one to make lewd comments as if I am now anyone's property.

Yesterday I had to face the ordeal of the market, to do the weekly shopping, and I heard mutters on every side: "5 husbands!" "5, plus the man she is with now...unmarried they say!" "I met him the other day, nice man...shame he's stuck with someone like her..." and so on. Every sentence like a lash on my back... The woman who handed me the fruit I was buying drew her hand out quickly, as if I might contaminate her. Another woman pulled her daughter away. But the pain of their judgement sinks to insignificance when I think of that day that started it all...that horrific day...To lose my dear husband would have been terrible, but to be robbed as well of my beautiful baby in one accident, my two reasons for living... it's unbearable. I try to numb it with any entertainment that I can find, any man that offers me protection, some sort of security...but my grief corrodes my insides, toxic to any relationship that comes close.

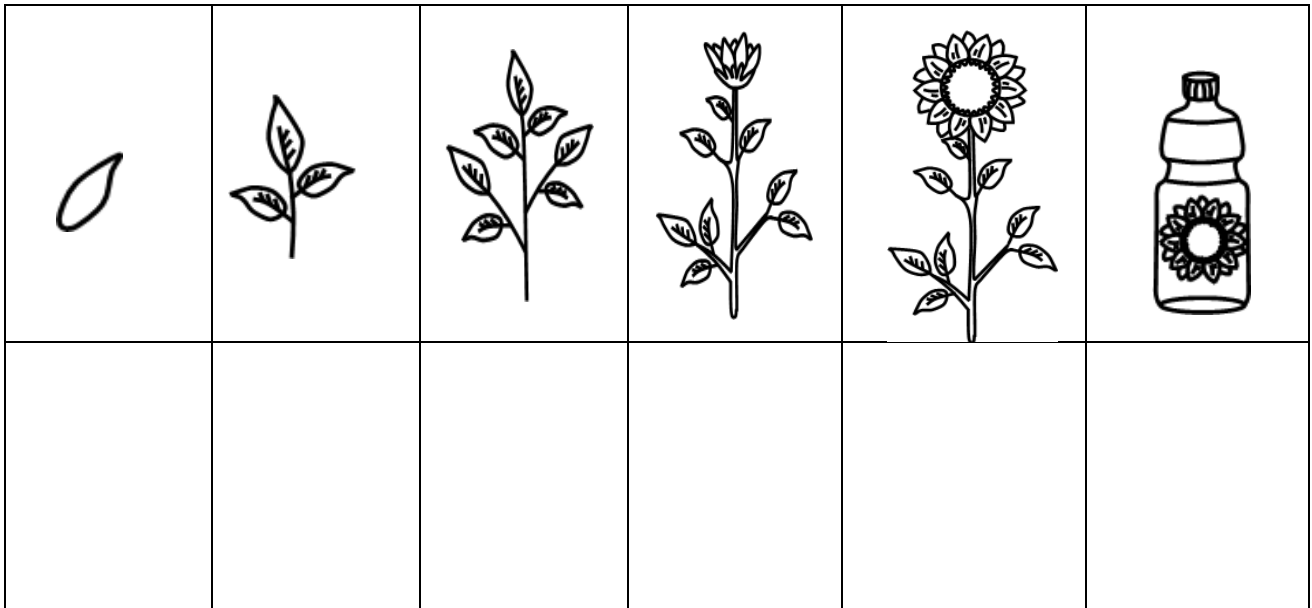
I hurry on to the well, my steps haunted by the whispers of the town. People that do not even try to understand me. I do not notice the man until it is too late...I stop short. Why is he here? There's never anyone at this time of day! What can he be doing? I look at him more closely and notice and he is not from our town. In fact, he's a Jew! Relief washes over me. He does not know who I am and so cannot judge me. And as a Jewish man, he would NEVER talk to a Samaritan woman. Feeling safe, I lower my bucket gently...

"Will you give me a drink?" I start up, shocked. Who is he speaking to? But there is no one else around... Somehow, he is talking to me!

Our conversation slips by, surreal. He knows EVERYTHING about me, my entire situation. But he doesn't lecture me. I don't see the flash of judgement that I have grown so used to. He seems to look beyond that, to see me, to want to speak to me. He promises me living water so that I will never be thirsty again. I don't get what he means at first, but later, I think I begin to understand. This terrible yearning for something to give my life meaning again has vanished. My grief and pain are still very real, but somehow every memory is infused with hope. Strangely, this man's acceptance has changed everything. He knew all my worst secrets. Yet he still broke social and cultural laws to speak to me, he put his own reputation on the line. He made more sacrifices for me in that one conversation than anyone has ever made for me before.

He tells me he is the Messiah... the one who has been promised. Suddenly, nothing else matters to me except that others in my town share my joy. Nothing they can say can hurt me. I have found something infinitely more precious! So I call them all to come and meet this Messiah, the one with living water that satisfies forever."

Picture of Participation of those judged/ left out



1. Show/ draw the picture of the 6 stages of the sunflower's growth – or any other image of growth that you choose as a group. Explain that the different stages represent the growing inclusion in church towards anyone who currently feels judged or marginalised.
2. Agree what group of people are most judged/ marginalised/ left out in our church. Ask 6 people to make a line, with each representing one of those stages, from the seed stage (completely left out of church) to sunflower oil (full inclusion and participation).
3. Ask people at the different 6 points to say what they think a person in this group would experience at this point on the scale – begin with stage 1, then stage 6, then fill in those between. Others in the group can add thoughts as well, not just those standing on the line.
4. Write the different things that they come up with under the six pictures of the sunflower.
5. Ask people where on this scale you think people in that group feel currently?
6. Pray through and discuss what actions we could take as individuals, a group and a church to help move to the next picture on the scale. Prioritise one as your Act of Love for this week.