



John 4

(Lectionary Year A, Lent 3)

By Beth Barnett

Reflections on John 4: Jesus and the woman at the well, to encourage conversations between small groups of people.

You will need:

- 1 (or more) presenter
- copies of this page / conversation questions distributed among your gathering

Time required:

10 – 15 minutes (or longer, depending on how much space you will give to the small group conversation section)

Connect: It's Complicated...

Was there ever a time when life was simple? When relationships and families were straightforward? I don't think so. There is a lot of misty-eyed sentimentality about the traditional family, but I think that is the extent of it. The 'traditional' family is a myth. Or perhaps better to say the 'traditional' family is the family with extra hangers on, multiple partners, re-arrangements, relationship bust-ups, people who won't talk to each other, favourites, scandals, griefs and silent sufferers.

I'm not saying this is the healthy family, or the ideal family. But reading the history books, including the Bible, we get the sense that families have never been quiet, orderly, and predictable. We need to keep our eyes open to the wider world to recognise that what is portrayed as 'normal' in our suburban images is really far from normal around the world. Widows and orphans abound, families separated by tragedy and turmoil, multiple partners, extended families, child-headed households, are all part of the 'normal' of family life for millions of people around the world. Skilling up for being family doesn't mean trying to get everything ordered and straight. Rather it means looking for the ways in which we can find life, real life, in the midst of chaos, change, challenge, heartache and surprises.

We are going to break out into some small groups for a few minutes and have a conversation: the questions on the hand out will help your group to think about our family stories, and share with each other. I'd like to encourage you to be generous and gracious with each other, making sure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to do so. Let's be gentle and kind as people share – these conversations can be hard!

What's your story?

Do you think you have a 'normal' family?

Are there times when you disagree with others about whether your family is 'normal' or not?

How do your various household members - your kids, your parents, your brothers and sisters - react to the complicated parts of life?

Have there been unforeseen challenges or surprises that have 'messed up' your family, but perhaps in a good way?

Thank you for sharing with each other – being vulnerable like that can be really challenging, but its also a really valuable part of being in a big family like this.

(encourage your group back together)

Content: What's God's Story?

In John 4, we read a story about Jesus and a woman who are standing by a well, in the heat of the day. On every level this meeting is extraordinary; in fact, more than that it's inappropriate, unlikely, compromising and dodgy.

A man talking to a woman.

A Jew talking to a Samaritan.

This is not the time to be out in the midday sun.

They are clearly both social misfits.

The man is unmarried, very strange for that culture.

And all around the town people know that the woman has had a string of husbands.

We don't know why. In her culture there were laws to protect widows that obligated the husband's next of kin to marry his widow. This could account for her track record.

Or perhaps she was divorced; was unfaithfulness in the mix? Whatever the reason, we know that any of those scenarios mean a life of grief, disruption and things not being 'normal'.

Jesus chats away though, as if they do this every day, as if everything is normal.

For Jesus, with the eyes and the heart of God in human skin, he sees pain and tragedy, things going pear shaped, heartache, settling for second best as completely normal.

Jesus has heaps of time for the person who is thirsty for life to get better, and for something other than the rat race of "you're not good enough" and of "you don't conform to our idea of normal". And for everyone who is that kind of thirsty (and who



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isn't) Jesus says, "Get to know God – that'll blow your idea of 'normal' right out of the water, and it'll keep you coming back for more."



Consequence

I would like to encourage us all this week to keep this story in mind – remembering that even when we feel like our pile of 'not normal' is enormous, Jesus is interested in helping us to see and experience a new normal.



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