



## Pause to pray - week 4 - 1st May

*'I have no husband,' she replied. Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true.'*

"I have no husband." - It was a pretty straightforward acknowledgement, but it brought into focus a significant element of this woman's story. Jesus' response is even more startling; he not only revealed that she had five previous marriages, but also that he knew about them. His attitude of love, hope and acceptance was not somehow conditional upon this woman maintaining a façade of conformity or respectability – she had a place in God's purposes, whatever her life story.

We have no idea about the circumstances of these previous relationships. Perhaps she had "played the field" or equally, and probably more likely, is that her husbands had died and she had successively become another man's "possession". This was often the case for widows in that culture. We have no idea, but we do know that many would have looked down upon her because of her life's circumstances. In fact many people who have studied this story point out that it would be unusual for a woman to visit the well in the heat of the day. They suggest that this might have been because she was shunned and ostracised by contemporaries and preferred to go there when she knew it would be deserted.

Whatever baggage she brought with her - disappointment, bitterness, guilt, opportunism, Jesus saw beyond that and invited her to engage with God in Spirit and truth.

Who in our world today feels unworthy and unaccepted? Who might feel that their lifestyle has simply left them outside of God's purposes? How can we communicate the narratives of grace? What opportunities might we have during these "40 days of Good News" to embody a message of welcome?

Pause to pray for those who might feel "beyond the pale", and all with whom we might have an encounter of love, hope and acceptance in the days ahead.

**All seeing and all-knowing God,  
We pray today for anyone who believes that they have to hide from you;  
For those whose life-journey has left them feeling beyond the reach  
Of your love, hope and acceptance.  
Where bitterness, pain and disappointment  
Seem to block out the possibilities of our Gospel story,  
Help us to truly be the agents of Good News.  
Forgive us if we have reinforced any narratives of rejection,  
And help us to be those who reflect your attitude of grace in all we do and say.  
Through Christ who became one of us  
So that God's love might reach all.**

**AMEN**