

People on the margins (option 1)

Vision: to understand that healing is spiritual, emotional and physical, and that God prioritises those people that everyone else avoids

Luke 8:40-56 – the woman who touched Jesus' cloak

Questions to discuss:

1. What were the effects of the woman's illness on her physically, emotionally and spiritually?
2. How did Jesus treat her?
3. Why was everybody so shocked when Jesus stopped?
4. Who do we stigmatise in our community? Give as many examples as you can.
5. What effect does it have on their lives?
6. What does this story tell us about how we should respond to the stigmatised and those on the margins in our communities, those who are ignored by others?

Act of Love: create an action plan to challenge the stigma related to one or more of the issues you identified; and choose an action to begin this week.

Going deeper:

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

And/ or: watch this creative retelling of the story: https://youtu.be/4_z2UNQrE_g (6:35)

Notes for facilitator:

- *The woman was constantly bleeding and could not go out into public; so she would have been isolated and shunned by others and probably felt far from God too*
- *Jesus treated her with dignity and love*
- *People were shocked because Jesus was on his way to visit the daughter of someone much more important – and contact with the woman would have made him ceremonially unclean*
- *The Bible study shows us that we should prioritise the stigmatised and vulnerable above others; we should treat them with love and respect.*

People affected by stigma who end up on the margins of our community not only have to live with the direct effects of whatever causes that stigma, but also have to cope with the impact of that, for example in a sense of isolation or low self-esteem.

We must respond to stigma as Jesus did throughout his time on earth – not in judgement, but through compassion to the individual, clear teaching to those around and joint action to include those on the margins more fully in our community.

Monologue:

"You don't know what loneliness is until you've suffered like me. Loneliness is not being alone. Loneliness is being surrounded by people, yet being invisible. Or worse, mocked, humiliated, shamed. My life was not always like this. 13 years ago, I was a normal young woman. Laughing with my friends in school, joking about the wonderful husbands that we would marry, dreaming of the jobs that we would do, imaging our children's faces... then in one blow, my entire future collapsed around me. My life, which had seemed full of possibilities, was reduced into this one tiny house.

The bleeding began 12 years ago and has not stopped. No doctor has been able to help. No traditional healer. Gradually my friends and family melted away. Now, no one comes near me. They call me 'unclean'. They are worried they might catch my illness. I am not living. I am just waiting to die.

Suddenly I hear a large crowd outside my house. I peep through the window – there seems to be some sort of procession going past! People are murmuring excitedly! One name comes up again and again...Jesus...

I've heard about Jesus. Even me, in my little house. Everyone is talking about him, about how wonderful he is. I don't know what to believe! Healing a leper? A demon-possessed man? Raising someone from the dead? Is it possible? Could he heal me?

I will try anything. I throw my cloak around me to hide my face, but even so as I creep out of my door, those that notice shout at me to get back inside, to stay away. Someone shoves me. My hands scrape the ground, I taste the dust...but I can't stop now. This could be my only chance. I weave through the crowd, ignoring everything, just focusing on that figure at the front. Fear overwhelms me. I can't talk to him! What would he say? If this is how I am treated by everyone else, how much less right do I have to talk to a great teacher like him? He would despise me! But he has such power...if he can raise someone from the dead, surely even touching his cloak might be enough?

I make a last effort and throw myself forward...my hand brushes the edge of his cloak...and... peace. I can't begin to describe the feeling that surges through me. The closest I can think of is my moments by the river, on my own, in the dark so that others do not see. I used to stand there under the light of the moon, the pleasant coolness of the water tingling against my skin, refreshing me, watching the thick, dark blood flow from my clothes where it collects and mingle with the water. For a few seconds, I feel clean... This experience was like that, but a thousand times more. I felt a lightness in my entire body. In the heat of the sun and the crowd, I felt suddenly cool. I felt clean, not just my clothes, but like all the darkness from my life was pouring away from me. My heart is pounding...I can't catch my breath. I know I am healed.

I had planned to melt back into the crowd, but the second I touch his cloak, he stops. "Who touched me?" he asks. His voice is completely ordinary, yet something deep within me leaps in response, as if I were a little child recognising its mother's voice. Yet I freeze, horror-filled... I long to get closer to him... surely someone who can make me feel like this cannot be cruel? But I am scared. I have suffered too much rejection... I can't move. One of his disciples points out, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." I assume that is the end of it. But Jesus asks again. I can't bear it any more. I fall at his feet and tell him my story... Then I look up, trembling. What will he say? I meet his eyes for the first time. To my amazement, they are fixed directly on my eyes. No one has

looked into my eyes for 12 years. I catch my breath. Then I notice that his eyes are filled with tears. Are those tears for me? How can he care so much? He doesn't even know me! Except, when my scared eyes meet his gentle, direct gaze, overflowing with compassion, I feel as if he does know me. I feel as if he has always known me. It is very strange... Then he says the most beautiful words...

"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace."

He called me his daughter.

Later I hear that he raises the daughter of one of the synagogue leaders... "In one day, Jesus raises a dead girl and heals a sick woman!" I hear everyone's excited voices. Little do they know that, today, Jesus gave back life to two women, not one. I can begin again."