

Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26 reflects the situation facing the church members who were Matthew's first readers. Jewish and Christian communities remained related at that time, though in conflict. Or, as biblical scholar Thomas G. Long writes, "a family dispute among loyal and devoted Jews – those who held that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and those who did not" (Thomas G. Long, *Matthew: Westminster Bible Companion*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1997).

When disputes arose between synagogue and church, the church turned to Jesus' words for a response. Some Pharisees question the disciples about Jesus' choice of dining companions. Before they can answer, Jesus explains his mission to call out to those needing healing and wholeness. Seemingly irrational hope flows through these stories. Tax collector Matthew would have little reason to hope for a life of purpose in God's realm. The religious leader had no rational reason to hope for the death of his daughter to be reversed. The woman whose illness had separated her from the community for over a decade had no reason to think that she would be able to get close to Jesus.

Through these stories, Matthew tells the good news of God's compassion that extends beyond human boundaries. A tax collector whose work funded the Roman occupation would have been considered a traitor among patriotic Jews. The disease suffered by the woman left her ritually unclean, separated from worship and community (see Leviticus 15:25, 27). Anyone who came into contact with her would share that separation. Young girls held little value in the society of that day. Beyond that, according to Numbers 19:11, her death rendered anyone who touched her unclean. Yet Jesus sits at the table with Matthew, honours the woman's touch and great faith, and takes the little girl by the hand to enjoy new life. Jesus' words and actions speak invitation and enact restoration. Matthew finds new life in the community of disciples. The woman is restored to wholeness and the possibility of returning to her community. The young girl is restored to family.

Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26

Q If you were to depict the call of Matthew in your own community, where would Matthew be when Jesus comes by? Who else would be there?

The gospel writer sets the call of the disciple Matthew amid a series of healing stories in chapter 9.

Q In what sense might the story of Jesus calling Matthew to follow also be a healing story?

Jesus' invitation to Matthew called him into new life, offering him a fresh start. The religious leader and the woman act in faith and hope, and life is restored to a daughter, the woman, and community.

Q Where do you find your own experience in these stories? with Matthew? the Pharisees? the disciples? the onlookers? the mourners at the funeral? the parents? the woman with the flow of blood? Jesus?