

Outsiders and insiders. Jesus eliminates all boundaries of who is an insider and who is an outsider. In Jesus no one is excluded

We have 3 stories in today's gospel reading. Each story has someone of great faith and each story is about restorative mercy.

Let's walk through each story and as we do I invite you to consider which person you resonate the most with.

Is it Matthew the tax collector, a woman living as an outsider, the pharisees, a leader pleading for his daughter's life, or do you resonate with being brought back to life?

If it helps to follow the gospel reading here is what is going on: Jesus calls Matthew, a tax collector. They go eat at Matthew's house who apparently has invited his friends and colleagues for supper as well as Jesus and his disciples.

The pharisees get all twisted up. A leader comes and pleads Jesus to come with him and while on their way there journey gets interrupted by a woman.

Sometimes the interruptions are part of your work, part of your calling He gets to the house and raises a girl.

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Tax collectors were rejected by their fellow countrymen, because the taxes themselves were harsh, also because the taxes were used to support the Roman Empire and its collaborators and also because tax collectors were often suspected of charging more than Rome was collecting, and they pocketed the difference.

Jesus shows mercy to the outsider Matthew and Matthew answers Jesus's call leaving everything behind. What an act of great faith.

The call is action-oriented, it calls us to live now as of today as if the rule and reign of God had come upon us in its fullness.

By calling Matthew Jesus upsets the Pharisees- not all Pharisees were against Jesus by the way. Jesus also likely upsets the disciples he called before Matthew. They were fishermen and as fishermen they would have paid much tax to the likes of Matthew.

No-one, no-one is disqualified from following Jesus. Jesus welcomes all- even people we might not like, or trust-

even those we call our enemies. While we humans are often busy counting people out- making outsiders Jesus is inviting people in.

We are called to identify and root out practices that implicitly or explicitly divide and marginalize, practices that create “outsiders” and “insiders.” [PAUSE]

As for the Pharisees they get all twisted up because Jesus is eating with tax collectors and other “sinners” - categories that create outsiders while making them the insiders.

In his answer to the Pharisees Jesus quotes the prophet Hosea and essentially tells them two things: that God prefers mercy to unthinking devotion to the requirement for sacrifices.

It is easy to do spiritual things by rote- sheer practice -like reciting the Lord's prayer, Mercy, however, quickly becomes an affair of the heart, involving a human face—a human story.

Jesus highlights God's love for those deemed undeserving. Ritual purity, while important, is less important than love of God and love of neighbour. [PAUSE]

We also can easily fall into this trap.

Secondly he tells the Pharisees, those who pride themselves on their knowledge of scripture,- to go and study some more.

That must have twisted them up even more

Back to the story: While at the dinner party a synagogue leader shows up and in an act of great faith he pleads Jesus to come and revive his dead daughter and Jesus obliges.

What is striking about this is that a leader would plead Jesus and plead for his daughter. This in a culture where women were often regarded as second class.

When he gets to the house mourners were making a commotion. People hired mourners to make grief stand out.

Jesus tells everyone to get out and raises the young girl. I wonder if he put them out of the house because they were a disturbance or because of their lack of faith. Or both.

Regardless what is clear is that the fact that there were mourners present signifies that the young girl had actually died.

I wonder if you've had the experience of being brought back to life by Jesus - metaphorically speaking.

In the centrepiece of our story we have another great act of faith by the woman who has been bleeding for 12 years. She approaches Jesus with a fierce hope, saying to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well”

The word translated as “be made well” in the NRSV — can also be translated as “save,” “heal,” “preserve,” or “rescue.”

This audacious woman not only makes her way through the disciples in order to touch Jesus’ garment,

she pushes through the words of Leviticus, words that call her “unclean,” and anything she touches will become “unclean” — including the one whose clothing she reaches out to touch!

Now being unclean means that for the last 12 years she has a spiritual, social and medical problem. Her bleeding renders her unclean, requiring her to separate herself from the rest of society. She cannot attend community events, she can't touch anyone at any time.

If she touches another person, her touch renders that person unclean. She must live in a world full of boundaries and exclusion, as a leper would—on the fringes of society, shut out, looking in from the outside. It is hard to imagine how lonely and ashamed she must feel.

Jesus stops, turns around, and sees her—  
Jesus sees her. Includes her.

When is the last time she has actually been seen as a human being ...

and without skipping a beat, praises her for her boldness, her daring, her persistence, her faith: “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well”

He restores her health and restores her to community. Double healing! [

Question: Is Jesus more interested in “eternal life” or “life here and now”? The answer is YES.

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From salvation to health to resurrection to thriving to restoration-to-community, healing comes in many different forms: spiritual, physical, emotional, social... we can trust that our most faithful efforts will be met with God's merciful healing touch. Regardless of the form that healing takes.

Healing takes many forms, sometimes not the one we wanted or hoped for. This is not because you did anything wrong or because we don't have enough faith.

It's as if Jesus is saying " Follow me. Yes, you. I know, I know: I know all about your past; but I'm calling you to a new future anyway. Take heart, my children, reach out, push through, and dare to touch the edge of my cloak — for I am already reaching out to you,

I will take your hand. And I will call you to stand up, follow me and go! Set out.

Embark on a new adventure with me by your side”

English French, black white, rich, poor pink purple blue. In Jesus there are no outsiders. Each of us has a place where we belong.

This week I invite you to one of the following three things: First If there are boundaries in you that have been placed in you as a result of being treated as an outsider,

I invite you to allow God’s healing touch to remove that barrier.

Second if there are boundaries in you that create outsiders in your life I invite you to consider allowing God to remove those boundaries. Lastly, this week I invite you welcome the outsiders that you meet, allowing God to work with you and through you to bring healing in helping to have that boundary erased and to help making them feel that they are no longer an outsider.

If you struggle with any of this please reach out to me. Happy to talk.