

Touched with Healing and Compassion

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams, preached at Footscray Baptist on June 7th, 2026 – Matthew 9:9-13 & 9: 18-36)

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Today in our readings we meet three people, all who have something in common.

Matthew is a tax collector. He like most people who collect taxes is not well liked. He is not only collecting taxes, he is collecting taxes for a foreign country, the Romans who occupied Palestine. His job involved collecting a certain amount of taxes for the Romans and then if he collected any more above that amount, that was his profit. Consequently, he was open to extorting and taking extra from the people. For this, the people saw him, as both a cheat and a traitor. Not 'unclean' in the religious sense but certainly an outsider in his community, associating only with other tax collectors and 'sinners'.

Next, an unnamed daughter of a prominent religious leader who is very ill and close to death. Her father is prominent in the Jewish community, a leader in the synagogue. He is desperate that his daughter gets better. So desperate, that he goes to the radical person Jesus, who has a reputation for healing others, but who is also quickly becoming a problem for the other religious leaders, and whom they are trying to eliminate. I wonder if they consider the father to be a traitor as he goes to Jesus, kneels before him and pleads for his help to restore his daughter to health.

Finally, an unnamed woman who is also desperate. She has been unwell for a long time – 12 years, probably as long as the daughter of the religious leader has been alive. She's been to doctor after doctor, spent all her money seeking a remedy. She is bleeding, she has been losing blood for 12 years, she would have been exhausted. She also would be considered 'unclean' due to the bleeding her illness was causing. She is desperate but she doesn't want to make a fuss, no doubt her illness was embarrassing as well, so she comes up with a plan.

Matthew, the unnamed daughter and unnamed woman are all considered as 'unclean' or 'sinners' by others in the societies in which they live, particularly by the religious people. They are all considered outsiders, they are all desperate in some way.

Jesus encounters all of them and 'touches' them in some way, 'touches' them with compassion and mercy.

Matthew upon meeting Jesus is called to follow him. Despite being an 'outsider', a 'traitor' and having what some would call a scandalous lifestyle, Jesus still reaches out to him and calls him to be part of the motley crew of followers. Matthew's response is to throw a party, have a barbie and invite all of his friends – most of whom are tax collectors or 'sinner's', after all who else would he hang out with, who else would have been his friends? And Jesus and the disciples were also on the invite list.

This party creates a bit of furore; Jesus is accused of associating with tax collectors and sinners.

When Jesus hears what they are saying. he takes the opportunity to teach them about God.

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First, he says he and God come for the sick not the righteous, after all only the sick need a physician, not the well. I can't help but wonder who he thinks the sick are!

Secondly, he says that rather than rituals and rules, what he and God prefer is the practice of mercy, of compassion, of inclusion.

In God's world, no one is 'unclean' or untouchable.

Then we see that Jesus practices what he preaches in the stories of the encounters with the unnamed girl and unnamed woman.

The unnamed daughter has died by the time Jesus get's there, having been interrupted on the way by the unnamed woman. This would make her ritually 'unclean', people would have worried about infection. Jesus enters the house anyway; the laughing of the crowd does not prevent him. In the house, he takes the hand of the girl, not afraid of 'touching' the 'unclean' girl and restores her to wholeness. No-one is untouchable.

The unnamed woman had interrupted him on his way. Desperate but not wanting to create a fuss, she tells herself if she just touches his cloak, she too would be restored to wholeness. So, in the midst of the crowd, she reaches for his cloak. She touches the hem of his garment, but this does not go unnoticed by Jesus. No one else knows who has done this, but Jesus knows. He turns and gazes at her, no doubt with eyes of compassion and mercy and calls her 'daughter', affirms her faith and she is made well. Jesus is not afraid to be touched by those considered 'unclean'. No-one is untouchable.

We like Matthew are called to follow Jesus. We need to heed his words – I desire mercy. Jesus is not afraid to associate with 'tax collectors', 'sinners', 'outsiders', nor should we be.

Who are the outsiders, unclean in our world, in our community? The homeless?

Those living with addictions?

Those living with mental health challenges?

Those that others push to the margins of society?

Even the person who is smashing the church windows in the last few weeks.

Do we actually associate with these people? Do we even know any of these people? Jesus wasn't scared to, nor should we be. No-one is 'untouchable'. The church exists for exactly these people, not so much for those of us who sit inside the church building walls. We need to spring the doors open wide and let them in. Jesus included everyone, no matter how scandalous their lifestyles might have been. In so doing we might be ostracised by the 'respectable' people, but we would be showing mercy as Jesus asks. We need to 'touch' them with love.

'When Jesus said 'follow me' he was walking toward the margins, not the mansions.¹ God and do likewise! Amen.

¹ Mark Sandlin, sourced from Facebook on June 5th 2026.