

Sermon for Sunday 7 June 2026 (The First Sunday after Trinity) – 10.00am Holy Communion

Carol Rivett, Reader

Hosea 5.15–6.6; Psalm 50.7-15; Romans 4.13-25; Matthew 9.9-13,18-26

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Please do sit down.

I'm hoping this morning I've got a far better behaved music stand than Elke had when she last did her sermon from the music stand. I don't know if you noticed, but the music stand just tipped up and kicked her sermon off, so I hope mine is better behaved this morning.

Here we are hopping about in the lectionary again. The reading for today comes from Matthew's Gospel. The whole of Matthew's Gospel is about the advancement of the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven. It is thought to have been written by a Jewish Christian man who was intent on showing that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, therefore fulfilling Jewish prophecy. In Matthew chapter 11, Jesus is called the friend of tax collectors and sinners, and these stories show that very clearly.

To put it into context, Jesus has been across the sea into the region of the Gadarenes, where he cast out demons from two men who were living among the tombs. He sent those demons who had recognised him for who he was into a herd of pigs who had then died in a stampede down a steep bank and into the water. The swineherds rushed off and told their story to the whole town, as you would. But the residents, I think, were scared and they begged him to leave. So he recrossed the sea in a boat and returned to his hometown. People were beginning to hear about Jesus and the things that he was doing. A paralysed man had been brought to him by his friends, and because of their faith, the man was healed. Crowds who were following Jesus saw this happen, and they praised him. Immediately after this, Jesus was going to dinner in a local house.

He did not mind what people thought of his behaviour towards so-called unsuitable people. Tax collectors were not only taking money away from individuals, they were collecting tax money on behalf of the Roman Empire, who were the Gentiles who had conquered Israel and were ruling over them. Many of them took far more money than they were entitled to and profited from the extra money. Devout Jews understood that they had the Promised Land, although they had lost control of it through the sins of the people. And they wanted it back. The reading from Romans outlined some of this.

So theologically, ethically, and socially, the Jews had their reasons to hate the tax collectors. Matthew was a tax collector. He is telling the readers, 'This is what I used to be. This was my life before I met Jesus.' He was called by Jesus personally to be one of his friends and followers. As I said, Jesus did not care what anyone else thought. In Isaiah it says of God, 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'My ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.' Jesus wants the different; the broken, the outcasts. He delights in what we reject, and he rejects what we delight in. Matthew may have already heard of Jesus and his teaching before this happened. He certainly had no hesitation in giving up his job and following Jesus straight away.

Food and drink feature quite a lot in the earthly story of Jesus. His first miracle occurred at a wedding where he was present. He was at a feast in Simon's house when he had his feet anointed with oil and dried with a woman's hair. And at the feast that was held after the raising of Lazarus from the dead, to name just a few. I'm sure that you can think of others. The Pharisees saw that Jesus enjoyed eating and drinking. And also who he enjoyed eating and drinking with. And they did not approve at all of this behaviour.

The Pharisees' holiness was all about being separate from people like tax collectors and sinners. It's interesting to see that they did not actually challenge Jesus himself, but they approached the disciples behind Jesus's back with their question. But Jesus must have heard it, and he gives them the answer. Jesus answers from life experience that sick people need medical help, not those who are well. Jesus had come to call sinners to repentance and therefore to full spiritual health.

What were the Pharisees doing in this regard? Nothing. The Pharisees knew that they had deliberately chosen to keep the sacred laws and to follow the teachings to the letter. They know that they are doing their bit to uphold the values expected from the chosen people, set apart for God. They are pointing out to Jesus that the people with whom he chooses to associate with were a disgrace to the name of the chosen nation of Israel. They kept themselves separate and away from sinners. As they didn't think they were sinners at all, or that they should have anything to do with them. He gives them the instruction to 'go and learn what this means,' which suggests he is saying they have not actually studied the Scriptures carefully enough. I cannot imagine that they took this criticism very well.

If we are honest with ourselves, how would we feel if Jesus was here now and spent more time with the gang that was smashing up the church, spray-painting it with graffiti, and throwing all the books and Bibles about, rather than with us in our specially prepared Bible studies or home groups. If the Pharisees had really been looking to uphold the values of God—mercy,

forgiveness, and justice—they would have been far more open to what Jesus was doing and tried much harder to understand him.

And then we have the story of the healing of the little girl. In Luke's Gospel, chapter 8, it actually tells us that she was the daughter of Jairus, who was a leader of a synagogue, and that she was about 12 years old. Not all of the religious leaders were against Jesus. Jairus asked Jesus to go to his home and bring his daughter back to life. So Jesus and the disciples got up and followed him. On the way, Jesus felt that he had been touched by someone and that some power had been taken from him. I have drawn on some of Luke's narration for the details here.

A woman who had been suffering from abnormal bleeding for a period of 12 years must have been truly desperate. She would have been an outcast, not only socially but spiritually. She would have been forbidden to mix with anyone at all, even her own family, while she was afflicted, and was also forbidden to enter the temple as she was thought to be ceremoniously unclean. She must have felt very isolated and lonely indeed. Not to mention the problems of the physical problem that she was suffering.

Despite the huge crowd that surrounded him and were probably jostling him, Jesus knew that this touch was different. He asked, 'Who had touched him?' The woman must have been terrified to own up that it was she, not knowing what Jesus would say to her, as she had broken the rule of ritual purity by touching him. Breaking both the religious and social taboos. But instead of rebuking her, he publicly acknowledged her courage and her faith. Jesus had not only healed her physically but had restored her socially by removing the stigma of uncleanness. Her faith had made her whole again. Jesus meets us in our deepest pain and distress.

Then Jesus proceeds to Jairus's daughter. We must always remember that God's delays are not denials. We saw this at the raising of Lazarus. Jesus holds power over the impossible and specialises in helpless causes. It appears that the funeral rites have already started, with the flute players playing and the crowd making a commotion. To be told by Jesus to go away because the girl was not dead but just sleeping must have seemed very funny to the crowd. We are told that they laughed at him. Jesus cleared the house, then went in and took the girl by the hand. She got up, alive again, and the crowd no doubt spread the news of this Jesus and the miracle everywhere they went.

There are some commonalities within these last two stories. Both people concerned are female, both ritually unclean, one by death, one by the bleeding. And both are referred to as a daughter. One was a much-cherished little girl from a wealthy family, and the other was a complete contrast— alone, unclean, and socially isolated. The child is about 12 years old. The woman has had her problem for about 12 years. 12 is a significant number in Jewish tradition, meaning

divine government, perfect authority, and completeness. For example, there were 12 tribes of Israel, 12 disciples of Jesus, and the number 12 features many times in the Book of Revelation.

Matthew left his work and his former life without a second thought and followed Jesus. He had faith. Both the girl's father and the woman who was bleeding had faith in Jesus that he could put things right, and he did. If we have a situation that seems totally insoluble in the real world, we must remember that with faith even the most impossible situations can be successfully resolved. With faith, all things are possible. Amen.