

“Love on the Fringes”

Matthew 9: 9-13, 18-26

The Rev. Joanna Samuelson
Designated Minister

June 11, 2023

From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

“Love on the Fringes”

Matthew 9: 9-13, 18-26

+++++

Let us pray: O Loving and Kind God, thank you for the gift of Your word for us this day – and for the words that you place on each of our hearts. And, O dear God, may the words that I have to offer this morning please You and honor You and glorify your holy name! In Jesus’ name, we pray, amen!

+++++

I must tell you that every time that I read this story – or engage this text for preaching – it takes me back several years ago to when our five children were young. They were all born within nine years of each other! And just for a point of reference, our youngest are our twins, Malcolm and Henry, whom some of you have gotten to know since our family has been here at First Church ... and they are now sixteen years old!

Anyhow, those years – when our kids were young – remain **a bit of a blur** to Shane and me! 😊 But I do remember that *multi-tasking* – and *simultaneous conversations* – and *constant interruptions* characterized those days ... while we were changing diapers, and taking our kids to story time at the library and to the playground and to preschool ... all while somehow *still* managing to do volunteer work at church, too! (I’ll never know how we managed to do all of that during that season of our life!)

Now, don’t get me wrong. I’m **not** complaining! Those years bring back tender and fond memories for me. Life. was. good! But it **truly was** one BLESSED INTERRUPTION after another!

As you may have guessed, all that personal background comes with *my reading* of our text from Matthew today.

Now, while it may be a story that is familiar to you, it is a bit hard to follow, isn't it? I mean, the Gospel writer of Matthew seems to be jumping **all over the place!**

.....

Our appointed reading this morning is from the ninth chapter of Matthew where we first learn of Jesus' interaction with *Matthew* the **tax collector** – who certainly was disliked and distrusted by the common folk ... and for good reason!

As you may recall, tax collectors, at that time, were known to be unethical and greedy – as they took advantage of the poor and peasant people for their own financial gain.

And yet, it turns out that Matthew is one of the twelve who Jesus called to be a disciple!

How could that be?

And then, if that's not confusing enough, our lection then skips a few verses – and jumps to verse 18 where we encounter someone who is referred to as a *leader from the temple* – who summons Jesus to go with him to his home to bring his young daughter back to life ...

And so, of course, Jesus agrees – **but** on the way to the leader's house ...

Jesus was then approached by a woman – who, Scripture tells us, had been suffering from “a flow of blood” for **twelve years!**

And then, in that very moment, the woman reached out and touched the **FRINGE** of Jesus' cloak – and we read that she was *instantly* made well through her faith!

But that's still not the end of this story!

Jesus continues along his way to the leader's house — and upon entering it, Jesus immediately pronounces that the leader's daughter is not dead but is merely sleeping!

Jesus then went to the girl, took her by the hand, and, instantly, she got up!

Here, we have *two* back-to-back miracles in *one story* ...and **THAT** is our text for today!

You may agree that this story is a bit challenging to follow – although it likely does reflect a day in the life of Jesus – who was not just a **miracle worker** but apparently – like caregivers of young children – he was the **ultimate multi-tasker** as well!

.....

The needs for healing and health and wholeness – especially among the peasant people in those days – were numerous and disproportionate – and overwhelming at that time!

.....

There is **something else** that captured my attention within our reading today ... and that is the Gospel writer's use of the word, **FRINGE** – as in the woman reached out and touched the **fringe** (or hem) of Jesus' cloak.

Now, what we know about this woman (from Matthew's account), is that she had a medical condition which had been causing her to bleed continuously for 12 years!

We also know that the Law (at that time) would have declared her to be ceremonially *unclean* due to her bleeding condition.

This means that she wouldn't have been permitted to enter the temple for religious ceremonies. And, according to the Law, anyone or anything that she touched would have become unclean as well.

So, here this unnamed woman was, an outcast for reasons beyond her control, someone who had been socially displaced to the **FRINGES** of society!

But, after twelve long years of suffering, she was desperate and in need of a miracle!

And, through the gift of her faith, she trusted that Jesus would be able to heal her.

And, as soon as the woman reached out and touched the **FRINGE** of Jesus' cloak, her bleeding stopped, and she was *finally* healed!

Through the boldness of faith of this unnamed woman, a direct connection is made between the **FRINGE** of Jesus' cloak and the outcasts who have been displaced to the **FRINGES** of society.

.....
While I was recently reflecting on this Gospel theme of Jesus ministering at the **FRINGES of society**, I also had the privilege of co-leading our annual Youth Mission Week with Melissa Kulwicki, here, at First Church, this past week.

And our theme this year was "Justice Begins at Home."

Throughout this past week of experiential learning and conversation -- and some *really good* questions from our youth, we all had the opportunity to reconnect with our historical (and historic) roots as a congregation within the social gospel movement.

And we also found inspiration through our current commitment to social justice and community service and advocacy work today.

Several of our FC members and friends spent time with our young people this week – to inspire and engage them in the work that we do together, as a congregation – and as we continue to respond to the needs of those who are indeed living on the **FRINGES of society**, here, throughout our wider community, and even just outside our doors at church ... literally!

And then, toward the end of the week, we were also able to move out into the community – for additional opportunities to learn and grow and serve in faith.

.....

Our Youth Mission Week this past week was certainly a time of building and rebuilding relationships among the youth and with the adults as well.

It was an intentional time of connecting and re-connecting following a time of disruption brought about by COVID and significant changes within our congregation.

And it was a time of restoring community.

.....

Our Gospel reading for today takes us all the way to the **FRINGES** – or the borders – of our own hearts – to understand that it is through the presence of Jesus in our lives that we find healing and hope and wholeness and love – as well as the restoration of our relationships with all people and all living things!

Thanks be to God, amen!

