



Matthew 9:9-13

NRSVUE

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax-collection station, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.

¹⁰ And as he sat at dinner^[a] in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting^[b] with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹² But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

Matthew 9: 18-26

¹⁸ While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader came in and knelt before him, saying, “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” ¹⁹ And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰ Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, ²¹ for she was saying to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” ²² Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And the woman was made well from that moment. ²³ When Jesus came to the leader’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴ he said, “Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. ²⁵ But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. ²⁶ And the report of this spread through all of that district.

Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live, move and have our being.

I watched a disturbing documentary called *Louis Theroux: Inside the Manosphere* about the global community of self-proclaimed “alpha male” influencers and coaches who “evangelize” a ruthless warrior ethos to men as a blueprint for success. Their version of masculinity includes misogyny, homophobia, and antisemitic rhetoric. They teach men how to monetize social media schemes to accumulate wealth, and many of them have indeed become uber wealthy.

The documentary also exposed their connections to politicians. But their real audience is often boys between the ages of 13 and 15 who are searching for purpose and meaning. These young men are encouraged to spend time in the gym and to cultivate an image of becoming a badass in the world.

These men seem to share similar stories growing up. Negligent or abusive childhoods

It is no wonder that a large segment of their audience consists of young men who have been left without attention, self-esteem, and community. Childhood neglect has left many of them searching for purpose, meaning, and a sense of belonging. Feeling like outsiders, they are drawn to these influencers, whose messages offer the empowerment and identity they have long desired. For many, these voices promise a path to becoming somebody.

The males also have a big following with female influencers. It helps young women promote their own social media influence even if they are degraded. They are able to monetize their platforms on-line.

These “men” seem to possess everything Jesus rejected from the devil in the wilderness. Power, popularity and possessions.

It was with these shocking images on my mind that I read about Jesus’ encounters with the outcasts of his time. They were labeled sinners.

We Christians like to emphasize that Jesus hung out with sinners but let’s be clear. The way we think of a sinner is more of a moral code breaker. During the time of Jesus, “the righteous” and “the sinner” were structural social classes. The poor were labeled as sinners by the political and religious elite. Sinner was a label given to anyone who did not adhere to purification rituals, paid enough tithes or broke gender taboos.

Jesus violated all of these things so I guess you could say Jesus fit the category of sinner as well.

As a side bar, the Pharisees had a purity map which kept different levels of sinners and classes at a distance. This was played out in the physical temple boundaries.

Could you imagine a church with those boundaries? Maybe we already have them—they’re just unspoken.

Jesus wasn’t just criticized, he was criminally accused of hanging out with sinners. Accused because he was seen as violating strict purity laws. Jesus crossed social barriers set by political and religious authorities and traditions.

Jesus broke gender taboos. By allowing a bleeding woman to touch Jesus, he was seen by the Sanhedrin as weak and less than holy and that he was spreading disease.

Jesus had female disciples, and he often spoke to women in public. If a man looked directly at a woman that was a crime and Jesus did not hesitate to make sure the marginalized were seen.

No wonder the desperate woman with the bleeding problem tried to go unnoticed by touching the prayer fringe of his robe. Jesus turned and looked directly at her.

Jesus touched those marginalized by their physical and social maladies and he went out of his way to care for them on the Sabbath. I would have said healed but I can’t relate to the actual

outward healing of someone. We may not be able to physically heal others, but we can see them and care for them as he did.

The worst crimes of Jesus were his welcoming of the poor and the gentiles into an alternative kingdom to that of the Roman and religious empires, he called it the kingdom of God.

The outcasts were drawn to Jesus. Jesus knew how to use a powerful loving influence.

Jesus was a threat to political and religious order controlled by the Roman empire and the Sanhedrin. Jesus knew his mission was being fulfilled every time he encountered the poor, the outcasts, and the oppressed.

In short Jesus wasn't a badass, he was a bad 'S.' He was filled with Spirit.

Jesus could care less about his reputation or his status or even the consequences of his mission to show mercy. If he feared anything it was probably that the authorities would be a constant buzz kill and get in his way. How does the historical Jesus of compassion and mercy outdo any contrived masculinity of the self-proclaimed bad asses of today's culture?

One day Jesus picked up the scroll in the temple and read, and I paraphrase, "the Spirit of the Lord, the big S spirit is upon me. That which alone has full authority is all over me and in me as Christ the anointed one, to bring good news to the poor. The Spirit has sent me to declare release to the captives and the recovery of sight to the blind and to liberate those who are oppressed."

Jesus was a bad 'S' in such a heavenly good way!

Jesus was a bad 'S'. Jesus did not flinch or negotiate in the face of threats on his life. He did not fear a stained reputation or being misunderstood. Jesus was a bad 'S' in the good way.

This was the scariest moment of my life because there was a fear that the end game would one way or another end in death.

In the Jordan, Jesus surrendered to this anointing. He surrendered to a life of mercy. Jesus taught that those who show mercy will receive mercy, and that they are truly blessed. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7).

Jesus told his apprentices he did not want sacrifices from them, he wanted mercy.

False ambitions are not reserved to social media influencers, just listen to any graduation commencement speech and you might hear the priority our graduates are told to place on achievement over mercy.

When will we truly listen to the words Jesus spoke on the mount, particularly the fifth Beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy"?

Here is how Richard Rohr so eloquently describes what Jesus is saying about being merciful.

“We do not attain anything by our own holiness but by 10,000 surrenders to mercy. A lifetime of received forgiveness allows us to become mercy: That's the beatitude. We become what we receive, what we allow into our hearts. Mercy becomes our energy and purpose. Perhaps we are finally enlightened and free when we can both receive it and give it away- without payment for punishment.” - Richard Rohr

In the parable of the sheep and goats Jesus explains to his followers that if they want to be labeled righteous it's not being one of the elites, it's by seeing those who need food, clothing the poor and welcoming the strangers and outcasts.

His followers asked him, “when did we see you hungry, poor. or as a stranger? Jesus answered, “When you do it for someone else you do it for me.” Matthew 25:40

I'm thinking the first step is to be able to have our eyes opened to truly see others. This probably coincides with an open heart and a non-judgmental mind. We will be filled with the Big S spirit. Because Spirit sees them and we become witnesses, participating in the love of Christ.

Jesus saw people. Like, really saw them until they felt seen inside and out.

So, what does it mean to be filled with the big S Spirit?

We are all feelers of Spirit at differing levels. Some often experience euphoria and others just a peace that is unexplainable. But these feelings are emotional responses to an inward reality, but they do not serve as evidence for Spirit's presence. The divine presence is always divinely present whether it is felt or not.

We can feel empowered to embody the fruit of the Spirit which Paul said to the Galatians are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and emotional regulation.

I don't know about you, but I have yet to achieve the fullness of the Spirit that embodies mercy. But if I go back to Rohrs words, we attain it through 10,000 surrenders to mercy. A full life of giving and receiving forgiveness leading to an embodiment of mercy.

Here is the final example of how Jesus was a bad "S". Jesus broke bread with his disciples. Those who were outcasts, women, tax collectors, etcetera. Back then table fellowship was a sacred social contract that meant sharing a piece of your life, peace and mutual commitment with all the other people at the table.

Jesus told his followers I am unashamed to be with you, and I don't just love you, I'm fond of you and will share my life with you.

I'm convinced it will take a filling of the Spirit to provide a compelling alternative for those 13- to 15-year-old emotionally outcast young men and women. When we see them, we will be doing the same for the Jesus we love. The Jesus we see in them.

Jesus was a bad "S".

Amen

Wednesday Respite is a 30-min contemplative service of scripture, prayer, music and a [Spirited Touchpoint](#) by Henry Rojas, spiritual director at Spirit in the Desert.

Touchpoint is a reflection on where God's story touches our life story. It is a short homily based on a biblical story of people in the Old and New Testaments and their relationship with God. Our spiritual ancestors' experience of God's grace connects with our lives in the present and our relationship with the Divine. Previous Touchpoints are available as [PDFs](#).