

Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 7, 2026

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

Sermon provided by Bishop Tessa Moon Leiseth for "Synod Assembly Sunday"

Dear friends, grace and peace to you from God our Creator and from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen!

First, I bring you a greeting on behalf of our bishop, Bishop Tessa Moon Leiseth. She prepared this sermon for us while many are at the synod assembly. She sends her greetings. And, she greets you on behalf of all of your siblings in Christ across the Eastern North Dakota Synod.

On this Sunday, we have a scripture text from the Gospel of Matthew that takes us right into some clear images of Jesus' power and how people are responding to him.

I want to start with the second story we heard read today. It is a story with a story tucked inside of it. As you heard, as Jesus was teaching, a leader of the synagogue came and knelt before him saying that his daughter had just died. And he asked Jesus to come and lay his hand on her so that she would live. Jesus got up and started to follow him.

His action is interrupted, though. There is a woman who has been bleeding for twelve years – imagine, twelve years! - who came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, saying to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well."

Jesus turned to her and said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

Jesus then continued toward the house of the man whose daughter had died. The man from the first story. While people did not believe Jesus when he said that the daughter was just sleeping, Jesus went inside, took the daughter by the hand, and the girl got up.

And the report of this spread throughout that district.

These are pretty incredible stories for us to hear with our modern ears. Both of these are healing stories – one tucked inside the other.

I invite you consider what we hear about Jesus in these stories:

- First, Jesus heals.
- Second, he heals people that are normally not even noticed or valued – in this case, a young girl and a bleeding woman.
- Third, even the powerful (the girl's father) came to Jesus in search of help – and found help.

And I wonder, who might *you* be in the story? Are you the one desperate for healing? So desperate that you will sneak up to touch Jesus' cloak when he can't see you? Or are you like

the father – desperate to do anything for your child? Do you throw yourself in front of Jesus, begging for help? Or maybe you are the daughter who is healed – not sure how it all happened but finding that the presence of Jesus brings you back to life?

Or maybe you are a different person not even named in the stories. I wonder about the disciples or the followers of Jesus – what was it like to witness these miracles? Or, imagine that the child raised from the dead has a mother, too, even though she wasn't named. What might it have been like to be the mother, knowing that your child had died but that your husband wouldn't give up and brings a stranger to the house for a healing? Maybe as you heard the stories this morning you saw yourself in yet a different role?

And maybe, you are a modern-day hearer, wondering if this kind of healing stuff even happens anymore. Maybe you are wondering how it all worked back then or maybe you are unsure if you can count on Jesus for healing. Maybe you've prayed prayer after prayer for healing and you have felt alone and unanswered.

Here is something else to consider from this story. When the hemorrhaging (or bleeding) woman touches Jesus' cloak, Jesus becomes unclean by the understandings of his day. In his day, when you come into contact with blood, you are no longer clean. You are not to touch anyone else before being cleansed.

And yet that doesn't stop Jesus. In fact, Jesus goes from there to touch a dead body, which would also make him unclean. He shouldn't be touching anyone else. And he certainly shouldn't be touching a dead body. How can an unclean one bring someone to life? What will Jesus do now that he is doubly unclean and has brought someone to life?

It is clear that the earthly categories don't work for Jesus. They don't fit. He isn't to be contained by the ways that we see and do things in this world. And in fact, Jesus is so full of life that he defies the powers of disease and death – even before his own resurrection. I like to think of Jesus in this story as a life force. Or maybe you could call it a life or resurrection power. Again and again and again, Jesus is on the side of life. And in fact, he *is* life.

Remember when I asked you who you are in the story? Well let me ask you when you have known Jesus as a life force in your own life? When was your life gone and Jesus brought you life? When had you reached the end and Jesus showed you a new way? When was a loved one miserable and in need of healing and you found some sort of healing in the midst of that? When have you encountered the life force of Jesus?

Our Gospel lesson that you heard read today started with yet a different story. It is the story of the call of Matthew. But it could be the call story of any of you. Matthew was a tax collector. Translation, Matthew was not one of the "good guys". He was one who might serve his own needs, help himself to some extra money if he thought he needed or wanted it, maybe even cheat you for his own gain. His job was to get the taxes collected but he could do it how he wanted, skim a little off the top, exert pressure, use unethical means, whatever he chose.

He's that guy. And maybe you think that's not you but maybe we are quick to set ourselves free. Maybe each of us has our own list of unethical choices, elevating our own needs over the needs of others, looking out for ourselves, and maybe even hurting others (intentionally or not) in the process. Maybe each of us knows parts of Matthew. Maybe we each are Matthew.

Jesus came to Matthew while he was still at his tax-collecting station. In other words, Matthew was at work doing what he did when Jesus came to him. Did Jesus say, "cut that out." Or "get your act together"? Nope. He said "Follow me." That's it. Follow Me.

Right after that, Jesus and the tax collector and whole host of unnamed sinners were in a house with Jesus and the disciples. And they ate together!

They ate together! They shared a meal and fellowship together.

Jesus didn't say, "Follow me and I'll make you a better person." He said, "Follow me." And the next thing they did was to spend time together around food.

*This* is the Jesus who is showing up in our Gospel lesson today. He is a life force, bringing resurrection and healing into people's lives. And he is calling the scoundrels and the unethical and the sinners to follow him and to eat with him.

So now, where are you in the stories with Jesus? Who are *you*?

There's plenty of room. You can bring your whole unworthy, messed up, needing-healing self. Jesus invites you. Take a seat at the table with all of the other messed up people. And enjoy the feast of life with Jesus at his table, right by your side.

Amen.