

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

Jesus brings hope to people in need, irrespective of their place in society. The church that bears his name should do the same.

We know Jesus' heart is for all people; no one is beyond hope.

Today's passage opens with Jesus back in his hometown, where he calls Matthew a tax collector to follow him. Here we see Jesus not only reaching out to the lost and lowly, but also to the privileged and powerful. Matthew's story raises the question of inclusion and exclusion: who is 'in' and who is 'out'.

At that time, there were people considered by society to be either in or out: there were the Romans who were in – the occupying power – who had their own society and as the oppressors looked down at the Jews; there were the Jews who had their own hierarchies of who was important and who wasn't, who can contribute and who should be shunned – the Jews looked down on the Gentiles.

Jesus shows that there is no place for saying who is in and who is out, including within his group of disciples. In the early chapters of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus begins his ministry by calling specific people to be his disciples. Now, Jesus calls Matthew to follow him. The choice of Matthew, you'd have to say, was a little bit out of the box – the other disciples were mainly fishermen.

Matthew is part of the tax collection system. Tax collectors had economic power but were despised because they collaborated with the Roman colonial power and often exploited people. Their social status was low, and life in a closeknit society would have been hard. Jesus calls him away from a corrupt, oppressive job and gives him hope.

The meal that follows evokes criticism. Eating together was a politicised act. People invited those with whom they hoped to find favour, within the social framework of the Roman Empire, where honour was gained through association with those of higher status. Is Jesus trying to get in with the tax collectors? Why is he not concerned about eating with people who were seen as unclean through their links with Gentiles? Jesus' critics do not consider the possibility that he might be pulling them into his orbit and giving them hope of a better way of life. Jesus responds (v. 13) by quoting Hosea 6:6.

'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'

The Pharisees and Jewish leaders were outraged. And maybe this is Jesus' point. When the Pharisees saw who Jesus was hanging out with, Jesus' response was: 'If you are

well, you don't need a doctor. I came only to seek and save the sick' (9:12). It's a little parable. Jesus says to his critics in effect: You are all insiders, saved, among the elect, you are already in; you don't need an invitation.

The leader of the synagogue is privileged in many ways but is facing the tragic death of his daughter. He kneels before Jesus, putting his status aside in desperation. Matthew highlights the confrontation with the professional mourners. Their mockery intensifies the impact of God's power working through Jesus to raise the girl to life. No wonder Jesus' reputation spread.

The woman suffering from haemorrhages is probably on the edge of society due to her gender, health condition and economic status. If she is suffering from uncontrolled menstrual bleeding, she would be seen as unclean and excluded from her faith community – so even the way she plans to approach Jesus is marginal. Yet, in her suffering, she shows great faith in him.

Matthew uses the word 'to make well' three times in two verses (vv.21, 22). The woman is healed of her illness but also 'made right' with her community through the confidence of her relationship with God.

Have you ever won a prize or been given a free gift? We often fall into the trap of supposing that the more we do the more God will be pleased with us. This can create the idea that some people deserve the good things they have in life, and others are 'hopeless'. But in this passage from Matthew's Gospel, the woman only needed to touch Jesus' cloak to receive a free gift. When might we need to trust in God's good gifts that he wants to give freely to us? And do we need to change our perspective that no one is beyond hope?

The woman who suffered haemorrhages just wanted to touch the edge of Jesus' cloak. Jesus raised a young girl from the dead by taking her by the hand. Jesus called Matthew to follow him, then shared a meal at his house. Personal touches that give hope.

Touches that include people not exclude people, that create community and wellbeing.

Whilst I've been away enjoying my 60th birthday treat with a holiday in the Canadian Rockies, there has been the outrage over the death of a young student in Southampton Henry Nowck. Protests took place in Southampton where it happened six months ago, following the release of police bodycam footage showing 18-year-old Nowak being placed in handcuffs after he had been stabbed by a Sikh man Vickrum Digwa, 23, who was [jailed for life on Monday](#). Certain politicians have been using the horrendous attack to stir up outrage claiming we live under a "two-tier policing" – that's the suggestion that police are more lenient towards ethnic minorities than white people for

fear of causing racial tensions or being accused of prejudice. The Vice President of the United States has waded in as well as Elon Musk, suggesting that immigration is to blame and we are losing our sense of English identity. Who is 'in' and who is 'out'.

I read an article from a Church minister in Southampton about how the church in the city has responded to the crisis:¹

Southampton church leader Paul Woodman sees a different story of ordinary people seeking the peace of their city through compassion and service amid grief and anger

Southampton has always been a city shaped by journeys. For centuries, people have arrived through its docks seeking opportunity, refuge, and a fresh start. Today, as I walk its streets and meet its people, I see a city facing significant challenges but also displaying remarkable signs of hope.

The fatal stabbing of university student Henry Nowak and the subsequent trial brought Southampton into the national spotlight and sparked public unrest fueled by grief, anger, and uncertainty. Residents witnessed scenes that left many feeling unsettled and saddened. Such moments expose fractures within society and remind us how fragile community can be when fear, frustration, and division take hold.

Yet what struck me most was not the unrest itself but the response that followed. Across neighbourhoods, people asked how they could help. Local clergy and community groups organised clean-up efforts following the riots. Neighbours checked on one another. Christian leaders prioritised visiting local gurdwaras to offer support and solidarity. Local organisations provided practical assistance to those affected. In the midst of tension, countless ordinary acts of kindness revealed a deeper reality: Southampton remains a city where people care for one another.

One local vicar who exemplifies Christian ministry is Rev. Sera Rumble of St Deny's Church. The morning after the unrest, while many people were still processing the events of the previous night, Sera organised a community litter pick to remove bricks, broken glass, and bins from local streets. Beginning early in the morning, volunteers worked so that children could walk safely to school and residents could begin the day with a renewed sense of normality. In a culture that often rewards outrage, such acts of service remind us that the Church's calling is not simply to comment on events but to respond with grace, truth, and a commitment to the common good.

This commitment can be seen in many corners of city life. One of the most pressing issues facing Southampton is homelessness and poverty. [Rising living costs continue to place enormous pressure on families](#), and many local charities are experiencing unprecedented demand. Yet alongside the challenge comes inspiring evidence of collaboration and compassion.

Christians are not called to observe society from a distance. We are called to participate in God's work of renewal wherever we find ourselves.

The Big Difference, a food redistribution charity serving Southampton, has become a lifeline for many organisations working with vulnerable people. Since its formation, it has redistributed millions of pounds worth of food and now supports more than 100 charities, schools, food banks, community groups, and places of worship. Every month, food that might otherwise end up in landfill is transformed into meals for people who need it most.

Christian witness is often most credible when expressed through practical service. The early Church gained attention not because it held power but because it cared for people whom others overlooked.

Perhaps this is the lesson Southampton is teaching me at present. The most important stories are often not the loudest ones. They are found in volunteers serving meals, teachers encouraging young people, pastors supporting their communities, community workers building trust, and neighbours choosing kindness over suspicion.

These stories remind me of the prophet [Jeremiah's instruction to God's people in exile: "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city."](#) (29:7) That calling remains remarkably relevant today. Christians are not called merely to observe society from a distance or to criticise its shortcomings. We are called to participate in God's work of renewal wherever we find ourselves.

Southampton has also long carried a story of arrival and welcome, shaped by its history as a port city and more recently by its role as a place of sanctuary for those seeking safety and a new beginning. That heritage continues to shape how many of us think about belonging and responsibility in the present.

God is still at work in this city and often through the faithful, quiet, and unseen acts of ordinary people.

Southampton faces significant social, economic, and cultural pressures, but it is not a city without hope. Every day I meet people committed to serving others, building bridges, and creating opportunities for those who might otherwise be forgotten.

That gives me confidence for the future. Beneath the challenges and beyond the headlines, God is still at work in this city and often through the faithful, quiet, and unseen acts of ordinary people. Perhaps that is where Southampton's most important story is being written.

The story of Matthew's calling is about profound grace, about a life turned around. The story of the women who touched the hem of Jesus garment is a story of mercy and

grace. It's a story that calls us to rejoice for all who had been beyond hope and have been found and can claim that Jesus is Lord. It is also a story that challenges each of us to go and share that hope with one another and those who think they are beyond hope.

May God help us to build bridges, include not exclude and show grace and mercy in the name of Jesus.

ⁱ <https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/henry-nowaks-murder-shook-southampton-but-the-response-from-christians-is-giving-me-hope/21622.article>