

## BREAKING FREE

Genesis 12: 1-9  
Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

Faith Community  
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### Introduction

A girl who has recently moved into a community goes to her new high school. For the first couple of weeks almost no one talks with her. She notices that there are lots of different cliques. Some you can tell because of the way they dress - both those who dress “grungy” and those who dress in expensive, name-brand clothes.

Others associate with each other because of what they do - sports teams or band or science club or cheerleading. Then there is the group that sneaks out behind the building to smoke.

What she doesn't realize right away is that these groupings of people began around the seventh grade. There is little crossover from one group to another after that time. No wonder she has a hard time fitting in.

The barriers we put up around ourselves sometimes seem like those “invisible fences” people buy to keep their dog in the yard - you can't see them, but they are very effective in keeping everyone in their places.

In a book called, Children's Letters to God, a girl named Nan asks God, “Who draws the lines around the countries?” The answer of course is, “We do.”

I have a souvenir from an important event in history. Like thousands of other people I have a piece of the Berlin Wall. For decades this structure stood as a symbol of division, antagonism, conflicting worldviews, and hatred. Thankfully the wall has been torn down and crushed into little pieces.

Divisions separate people. Sometimes it's important to reach beyond the boundaries that attempt to contain us.

### I

Jesus demonstrates the breaking down of barriers. He calls as one of his closest religious leaders, a man who everyone knows is a sinner. Jesus asks Matthew to become one of his disciples. Matthew is a tax collector, and a tax collector is the epitome of a sinful, despised person.

Tax collectors were hated for two very good reasons. First, they worked for the Roman government to get taxes from the people. In Matthews' case, he is a Jew working for the Roman government, which was often unkind to Jews.

And secondly, tax collectors had to collect a certain amount from the people, but beyond that amount they could charge whatever they wanted from the people and keep all the rest for themselves. They weren't modest in the amount they decided to get for them selves. So, like ambulance chasers today, they weren't well liked, but they were very wealthy. In Jesus' time to be a tax collector was to be a legal thief.

Not only does Jesus call Matthew, a tax collector, to be his disciple, but he goes home with him to have dinner. In our society to have dinner together is an expression of caring. People who like each other get together for dinner. There is an intimacy about eating together. In Jesus'

time to eat together was an even more intimate expression. So the religious leaders are shocked that Jesus would be sharing a meal with known sinners.

Jesus defied the barriers of association. Ironically the one considered the ultimate sinner follows him, while the religious leaders back away from Jesus, questioning his associations.

## II

Jesus also ignores the rules of ritual purity. A woman who has suffered with hemorrhages for twelve years reaches out to Jesus in an attempt to be healed. Her bleeding has made her unclean. People can't associate with her because if she touches them, they are instantly unclean also. For twelve years now everything she touched has been labeled "unclean."

Desperate to be rid of this disease, she comes up behind Jesus and touches his robe. She believes if she can just touch his clothing she will be healed. The normal response to her doing this would be for the person touched to lash out at her, scold her, probably condemn her, because she has just made him unclean.

But Jesus doesn't do that. He encourages and supports her. "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well."

Jesus crosses over a well-known boundary of ritual purity to help a person in need. He ignores the rules about who you can touch and what is clean because he sees a woman who wants to be cured. She trusted in him and he knocked over the barriers of who is considered clean, and healed her.

## III

Jesus reaches even beyond pass by on the other side of the road when they see the man who has been beaten, robbed and left for dead? If they touched a dead body they would have to go through this long cleansing process.

When Jesus is approached by this man, he ignores the limitations of purity and goes to his house. The funeral is already in progress. People are crying. Jesus asks them to leave while he goes into the girl's room and lays his hand on her, and helps her stand up. Jesus stepped beyond one of the greatest fears - death - to raise the man's daughter from the dead.

## Conclusion

In all these experiences Jesus is breaking down barriers in order to reach people. He goes beyond the "sinner" label, beyond the "good guy/bad guy" division to call the right person as his disciple. He steps over the purity restriction to heal a woman. He allows himself to become unclean so she can be healthy.

Finally Jesus reaches beyond even the boundary of death. Because of one man's faith he enters the room of a corpse and brings this man's daughter back to life.

Remember in the beginning when Jesus called Matthew to be his disciple and then went to eat with him. The religious leaders saw him there and asked, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

The disciples didn’t respond. They might have said, “Because he cares about them.” Again and again Jesus reached beyond the human boundaries to reach people. This Jesus is the one we follow as the Lord of life.

Amen