

**TOØ MESSY / Unit 1: Gag Reflex**  
**Sermon 1: Dixie Cups (Matthew 9)**  
**September 20, 2015**

We like to be trend setters here at Capital City, so we decided to give you all a souvenir cup this morning. Unfortunately we are kind of cheap, so we're just giving you these Dixie cups, and we didn't even print anything on them. So when you get home, you can use a permanent marker to draw our logo on the cup, and today's date, before you put it on your mantel. Hang on to this cup, you are going to need it a little bit later.

Now, last week we introduced our theme for this Fall: **TOØ MESSY**. Because, our world is a very messy place. And I'm not just talking environmentally, I'm talking economically, and politically, and morally. Racial tensions are escalating. There are tensions over terrorism, and immigration, and gay rights, and religious freedom, and global warming, and abortion, and pornography, and gun control, and the role of big government, and legalized drugs. Our world is a very messy place. Thus the stage: it could be quite beautiful up here, but there is all this litter, this garbage messing it up.

But our world is also messy at the micro level. People are messy; people out there, people in here! A lot of us struggle financially, often because of our envy, and our greed. A lot of us struggle physically, sometimes because of our lack of self-control and our resistance to healthy habits. A lot of us struggle with lust: so the porn business is booming, and our marriages are strained. We battle anger, and unforgiveness, and bitterness, and rage. We battle a whole host of addictions, and other self-destructive, family killing, soul killing propensities. We're just messy!

And here's what we tend to do: when people are messy, we tend to lean away. Which is different than Jesus. When people were messy ... Jesus leaned in. We tend to lean away. Which creates a problem. We're on a mission from God. We are here to offer a very messy world God's truth and God's grace. But if we lean away from the messes, we won't get it done. Are they "too messy" for us to love on? Or can we learn how to lean in "to the messy"? Like God did. Like Jesus did. Like he tells us to. Even when it means some of the mess will get on us.

But here's the deal: Leaning in is hard. It's pretty easy to say, it's really hard to do ... for reasons that go far deeper than you might know. But if we don't learn how to do it, they won't see Jesus in us. They won't feel his grace through us, and they won't be willing to hear his truth from us. So for the next 3 weeks we're going to try to unpack why it's so hard for us to lean in. Listen guys: our natural inclination to lean away is out of synch with God's will. We're going to dig into the why it's so hard for us, so we can learn to do life God's way.

Now where we're going over the next 3 weeks is going to help you whether you are a Jesus follower or not. This stuff is going to help you understand yourself, this stuff is going to help you do life better whether you are a believer or not. So if you are just exploring this Jesus stuff right now, if you are not sure you buy into this whole Christianity thing yet, I think you are still going to learn a lot about yourself if you stick with us the next few weeks. But if you are a Jesus follower, you need to listen. Because we are going to talk about some things that are necessary if we are going to be God-honoring.

Okay, what we are going to try to unpack this morning centers around this cup. It's really not a souvenir cup. And here's the big the idea: We erect boundaries that God does not honor. We build walls that God does not honor. And our boundaries, our walls eviscerate our effectiveness as God's emissaries to this broken world. Our boundaries cripple us as whenever we try to offer God's grace and God's truth to a messy world.

Let's dig in and see how it works. If you have a Bible with you, or a Bible app on your phone or tablet, find Matthew chapter 9. As you are getting there, let me set the context for you. Jesus grew up in this region called Galilee, near a lake called "Galilee," which is about 2/3 the size of Lake Cumberland. There was a major road that passed by the lake, and a lot of commercial fishing on the lake. That's where this story takes place.

Anyway it says, verse 9: "As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth." Now Matthew was a tax collector. We need to understand what that mean -- socially. Now we don't know what kind of a tax collector he was. Maybe he collected tolls from the caravans that were passing along the road. Or maybe he was taxing the fish the fishermen were catching from the lake. The

government always wants its cut. What you need to know is that tax guys were considered real low-lives in that world. They were some of the worst. If the government wanted \$10, in this world the tax collector would charge \$15, and pocket the difference. So they were considered greedy, self-serving parasites. And the tax collectors dealt with Gentiles every day. Good Jews kept their distance from Gentiles. Good Jews wouldn't touch Gentile money. Good Jews wouldn't work on the Sabbath, like these tax collectors did... And no good Jew, no good, God honoring Jew would ever invite a tax collector to be a disciple.

Which is exactly what Jesus did. And for some reason, Matthew accepted, he became a Jesus follower. Now I suspect there is more to the story than we read here. I suspect that Matthew had been hearing about this Jesus. Maybe he had heard him preach. Maybe he had seen a miracle or two. Maybe he had been feeling the nudges from God ... all of us do, no matter where we are, no matter what we do. Maybe Matthew was already near the end of that "just looking" stage. Here's the deal: at some point God is going to bear down and tell you, "It's time," like Jesus did for Matthew. And if you keep telling God, "Not yet," at some point your heart is going to get really hard.

Anyway, Matthew is pretty stoked. This is pretty much a total makeover for him. And his first response is to throw a party. Which is a great response! You think coming to Jesus is worth a party? The problem is, this low-life didn't have any "decent" friends. He's all excited, so he throws this party, but the only people he is close to are other tax collectors and sinners. I've told you about the reputation of tax collectors. Well these sinners ... Those were the people who just didn't care. They didn't care about church. They didn't care about giving their tithes to God. They didn't care about going to Jerusalem and offering sacrifices in the temple. They didn't care about rubbing shoulders with Gentiles. They were sinners – and didn't care. They were unholy, unclean, immoral – the good Jews thought.

So some of the good Jews, the Pharisees, were disgusted. They were disgusted, not just with the tax collectors and sinners, but now with Jesus too. If you hang out with disgusting people, some people are going to get annoyed. Now the way the story reads is a little weird. It says the Pharisees saw that Jesus was hanging out with tax collectors and sinners,

and they were disgusted; but instead of confronting Jesus, they confront his disciples. Why wouldn't they just confront Jesus? I think probably because Jesus was inside the house, and at least some of the disciples weren't. The Pharisees aren't going to go in the house. They are not going to soil themselves by rubbing shoulders with tax collectors and sinners. So they kind of stand outside and challenge the disciples.

Now here's where I may be stretching it a bit. I kind of wonder whether some of the disciples are outside because they weren't comfortable in the house either. You see, most of the disciples were pretty good Jews, rather religious men. It's bad enough for Jesus to invite Matthew to join their group, it's a whole lot harder to go into Matthew's house, and hang out with Matthew's friends. I suspect that some of the language inside wasn't too pure, and maybe some of the clothes weren't too proper, and some of the food wasn't too clean. So maybe the disciples kind of drifted outside... You know, it's still hard to follow Jesus, because sometimes Jesus goes where we don't want to go.

And I suspect when the Pharisees confronted these disciples, they were kind of stuttering around. They were probably a bit embarrassed, and struggling for words. Because, in their world, eating with tax collectors and sinners was scandalous. It might look like you were condoning who they were, like you were accepting what they were doing. When you rub shoulders with the messy, some of the mess rubs off, doesn't it?

Maybe their confrontation was getting heated, and loud, I don't know. In any case, Jesus comes out to confront his accusers. And this is what he says. This is the part we remember; this is the part we hang on to. He says, "Healthy people don't need a doctor -- sick people do." You guys don't need me; they do! He says, "I'm just making a house call, guys." We get that; we can accept that.

What maybe we have never really pondered is what Jesus says next. And this may be is the most important part. He says, "Now, go and learn the meaning of this Scripture." Now he's talking to a bunch of elders, and deacons, and Sunday School teachers, and preachers, and he says, "You need to go ponder what the Bible really means. You think you know God's heart, you think you teach his Word, but you're missing the point!" He

says, “I want you to reflect on what God means when he says, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” (repeat)

Did you know that I taught the New Testament in Bible Colleges and Seminaries for about 15 years, and I have preached and taught the New Testament here at Capital City for over 20 years, and I don't think I have ever stopped and pondered the verse Jesus told them to stop and ponder? Do you know why? I think maybe it's because I haven't always put myself in the right place in the story. Where do you fit in this story?

- Are you a Matthew? New to following Jesus, but on fire, all excited, and wanting some way to share what you have found with some of your friends?
- Are you one of the tax collectors, one of the sinners? Maybe curious, but not ready to jump in yet?
- Are you more like one of the disciples? You are a Jesus follower, but there are places he wants you to go, and things he wants you to do, you're just not sure about?
- Or are you really like one of the Pharisees? There are things Jesus did, things Jesus said that you just think are wrong. You might not admit that out loud, but it's really how you feel.

I'm not sure I ever really pictured myself as one of the Pharisees, or even as one of the reluctant disciples. And maybe that's why I have never really pondered what Jesus meant when he said, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” You see, sacrifice is about getting clean, it's about staying clean. Mercy is about getting dirty. Sacrifice is about separating myself from anything that might make me impure; it's about leaning away from whatever is impure. Mercy is about leaning in. Sacrifice is about me, and how things affect me; mercy is about you, and how things affect you. Sacrifice is about making things better for me; mercy is about making things better for you.

And there are two huge words we overlook. God doesn't say, “I desire mercy and sacrifice.” That's what I would have expected God to say. He says, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” In reality God requires both. But if they clash – and they will, God says, “Mercy wins.” God is revealing his priorities. Sacrifice is important, our holiness, our purity is important to God. But our mercy, our grace, our compassion is ... more important, to God. When it comes to a choice between staying clean, and getting your hands dirty for God, when those options clash – and they will – God says,

“You choose mercy, you choose grace.” Do you remember the story of the good Samaritan? You choose grace.

And then there is that second huge little word. God says, “I desire ...” “I desire, I want, I take pleasure in mercy, not sacrifice.” Does that matter to you ... Jesus followers, what God desires, what his priorities are? Does that matter to you, that God desires from you, from me, mercy, not sacrifice. I hope so. You see, when we call Jesus “Lord,” we’re telling him, “Your desires are more important than my desires. Your will for me is more important than my will for me.” I’m telling you guys, following Jesus in this may be one of the hardest things God ever asks you to do. Do you know why? ...

Okay, find your little souvenir cup. Let’s use it for an experiment. You don’t have to do this physically, but I want you to follow along mentally. This will be a thought experiment. You need to imagine doing this. Ready? What if you were to work up a good mouthful of saliva, and then dribble it into your cup? Now, take a good look at that mess of saliva in the bottom of your cup. Could you drink it? Could you just put it back to your lips, and swallow it down? A few of you might do it just to gross out the people next to you. Most of you would probably at least hesitate. And probably some of you would say, “Uh uh! That’s disgusting!” Now think about it: just a moment ago that same saliva was in your mouth, and you would have swallowed it without hesitation. But once saliva leaves your body it becomes spit, and then it is disgusting. Now there’s no physical difference between saliva and spit, but there is a vast psychological difference. If it is inside, if it’s part of my body, it’s okay. If it’s outside, if it is outside my body, it’s disgusting.

So much of our life is controlled by what disgusts us. I get up in the morning, and I shower, and I brush my teeth, and I use deodorant because if I don’t, I fear I would disgust you, and I might even disgust me. I try to put on clean clothes, and check my fly before I get up to preach, for the same reason. I eat with my mouth closed, I use a knife, and a fork, and a napkin because eating most foods with my hands is disgusting. I turn on the fan in the bathroom, I tell the kids not to burp or pass gas in front of people, because it’s disgusting. I kiss my wife on the mouth, I rest my hand on her arm or her leg; but I refrain from doing the same to other women, because that would be disgusting; and I certainly refrain from

doing it to another man, because that would be even more disgusting ... to me.

Here's the deal. It's not just about food, and clothes, and manners. It's about people, too. Some people are ... "disgusting." Some people are simply creepy. Others are flat out scary. Some are vulgar, and it's disgusting. Some are annoying, and that can be disgusting. Some are just different – a different color, a different shape, and that disgusts some of us. Some are sinful. And some of those who are sinful sin sins that are particularly disgusting. Gossips, addicts, rapists, philanderers, adulterers, betrayers, blasphemers. You've got your list of disgusting people, usually of sinners who sin sins worse than yours.

You see, disgust dominates our lives – biologically, morally, socially, religiously. And our response to disgust is universal. I found some pictures of disgusted people. You don't have to hear a word they are saying – you can read it in their faces. The brows are lowered, the eyes are narrowed, the nose is wrinkled, the upper lip is raised or curled. Sometimes on the inside you feel this need to spit, or even to vomit. Even babies! You can tell when a baby is disgusted, can't you? You ever give a baby a piece of lemon just to see that face? The quickest way to wipe disgust off a baby's face is to give them a piece of bacon.

Well, here's the deal about disgust. There are guys who study this stuff and write books about it. Some pretty interesting reads. They tell us that disgust is all about boundaries. It's about building walls. When a food smells bad we don't let it enter our mouth. When something is dirty we don't put it into our mouth. Disgust creates a boundary, a wall, disgusting things can't cross. When a person smells bad, or is dirty we don't let them in. When they disgust us we don't want them to violate our boundaries, our walls.

And if they make it through ... The experts tell us that disgust is all about expelling. It's about spitting out, or vomiting out something disgusting. It's about avoiding, or pushing away or expelling something offensive to us. We do it with food, we do it with things, we do it with people. We try to protect our purity by pushing away anything that is impure. We want to purge whatever violates our boundaries.

Here's something else the experts tell us. They tell us that most all disgust is learned. For the most part, you're not born with it. A baby will put just about anything in its mouth. That's why you've got to keep your floor clean, and your cupboards locked. A piece of old gum, a nickel, a rock. When Alatheia was about a year old we found her playing with her ... poop. It was all over her hands, her face, her body – she was having a great time. We had to teach her that was disgusting – like gum on the sidewalk, or playing in the toilet, or eating the cat food. And it's pretty much the same with people. Babies don't care what color people are, or what shape they are, or how pretty they are, or how smart they are, or what they are wearing. We teach them what is acceptable, and what is "disgusting." They learn disgust from us. And here's the deal, what you learn when you are young, is very, very, very hard to unlearn.

Which is one reason we don't do so well at offering God's grace and God's truth to the people who disgust us. We say we want them to know Jesus, but we don't want to soil ourselves trying to reach them. Did you know that when we label people, when we start treating people differently based on the group we put them in, we render ourselves impotent as conveyors of God's grace and God's truth? As our saliva becomes spit because it is outside our body, people become disgusting to us, when they are outside ... our body.

This is hard stuff. It's not that hard to understand; but it's really, really hard to obey God when he says, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Because when someone disgusts us, we desire sacrifice, not mercy. So, let's go back to the party: where Jesus and the tax collectors and sinners are on the inside, and the Pharisees and at least a few of the disciples are on the outside. And let's change up the players just a bit.

- As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting in his mosque. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew did. Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many other of his Muslim friends. But when the church people saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why would Jesus hang out with them?" And Jesus said to us, "Why won't you?"
- As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew hanging out with some migrants. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew did. Later, Matthew invited Jesus and his

disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many other of his migrant friends. But when the church people saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why would Jesus hang out with them?” And Jesus said to us, “Why won’t you?”

- As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew hanging out with some addicts; or, with some of the poorest of the poor; or, with some folks with LGBT stickers on their cars; or, with some prodigal kids; or, with some Democrats (if you are a Republican); or, with some Republicans (if you are a Democrat); or, with some abortionists; or with some Duke fans ... you’ve got your list. And Jesus says, to us, “I desire – God’s heart, God’s desire for you, is – mercy, not sacrifice. I want you to lean in, as hard as it is; not away. I want you to be willing get messy, if that’s what it takes to share the grace and the truth of our God.

I’m not saying we condone sin. I’m not saying we join them in their sin. But Jesus had the remarkable capacity to hate the sin, and still love the sinner. And God has the inexhaustible capacity to hate the sin that kills his kids and still grace the sinner (thank God). And we have the mandate to lean in, not away. No one is too messy for grace. What makes it so hard is that our hearts get messed up with ungrace.

Remember: We erect boundaries that God does not honor. We build walls that God does not honor. And those boundaries, those walls eviscerate our effectiveness as God’s emissaries to this broken world. Our boundaries, our walls cripple us as whenever we try to offer God’s grace and God’s truth to a messy world. So ... go and ponder what God means when he says, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” ...

Now to be honest, we are pretty good at tearing down walls inside this family. If you have ever looked around during our Lord’s Supper, it’s really an odd and magical thing. You stand in line next to people so different from you. You probably wouldn’t hang out with a lot of these people anywhere else. Rich and poor, black and white (and colors in between), old and young, Republicans and Democrats, PhDs and high school dropouts. We also have adulterers, and drug addicts, and porn addicts, and workaholics, and marriages that are struggling, and people who are depressed, and who struggle with anger, and bitterness, and unforgiveness. And we stand in line together, and dip into the same tray –

for grace. And there is something that binds us together into a family tougher than blood. Something Jesus did for us.

But sometimes the kind of people we accept as family in this room, we push away outside these walls. I've called up a few of your neighbors. \_\_\_\_\_ is a Democrat; I'm not (I'm actually more libertarian). (exclude) \_\_\_\_\_ is a black; I'm not. (exclude) \_\_\_\_\_ is a white supremacist; they disgust me. (exclude) \_\_\_\_\_ is an adulterer. He has broken his family. (exclude) \_\_\_\_\_ is a porn addict. (exclude) \_\_\_\_\_ is a cantankerous old coot. \_\_\_\_\_ wears has all these tattoos, and piercings, and wears clothes that disgust me. (exclude) \_\_\_\_\_ is leaning towards his LGBT friends. There just aren't many people out there who meet my standards of holiness. Now, if they were inside these walls, I might try grace. But since they are outside these walls ... But God says, "Go learn what I meant when I told you: I desire mercy, not sacrifice." Because if I can't get over my disgust, if I can't love who God loves, I really can't love God.

All the poor and powerless; And all the lost and lonely;  
And all the thieves will come confess; And know that You are holy

All the hearts who are content; And all who feel unworthy  
And all who hurt with nothin' left; Will know that You are holy

So ... Shout it; Go on and scream it from the mountains  
Go on and tell it to the masses; That He is God