

**Break Dance**  
**“Go beyond what’s fair.”**  
**Matthew 9:9-13**

*Fourth in the series: Living the Dance (living through trials)*

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**When Someone Isn’t Invited to the Dance**

This was not just a “thoughtful thing” for Jesus to do. Not this time.

It wasn’t the same thing as the change that came over me the one time when I took my Traverse City Confirmation class to Detroit. I had wanted them to visit a place where mission was taking place. If they could see mission happening, I thought, they might be able to imagine themselves practicing mission in their lives. And if they saw poverty in a setting like the Cass Corridor, which was a much different world than they knew in Northwest Michigan, perhaps their eyes would be open to see the human needs that existed on their own doorsteps. I was right. That’s what happened.

But I hadn’t bargained on the lady sitting at the table, waiting for Saturday lunch to be served at the Cass Soup Kitchen when we were there. After Pastor Rowe told us about the ministry while our group sat in the sanctuary, he had us go into the Fellowship Hall to take a look; and as we were leaving the lady sitting at the table grabbed my sleeve so I pulled to a stop. I looked at her looking up at me.

“Well,” she said, “aren’t you going to stay and eat with us...or are you too good?”

That changed me. After that I always scheduled our group to stay and serve and eat with the people. You can’t insulate yourself from people because they’re different or poor when you’re not.

But it wasn’t like that this time with Jesus. Levi wasn’t poor or different, at least, not different as being different in race or nationality or political party. He wasn’t awkward socially, and he didn’t have any mannerism that would have made it uncomfortable to be around.

If he had been like any of that, I believe Jesus would still have made a point to be with him. Jesus *did* make a point to be with people who were down and out. We know that. Yet, this was different; and this difference is as crucial to know as anything in the Faith.

## Sin and Redemption

Levi was an enemy...the worse kind of enemy. He was like a cross between an American who turns his back on home and country to join al-Quida and a Bernie Madoff who gets so obsessed with accumulating personal wealth he swindles hundreds of people out of life savings.

Levi didn't come from Rome, a brutal foreigner. Levi was a Jew who collaborated with the brutal oppressor to get rich. He was doing violence to his own people. He and his tax-collecting friends were living high while they helped to break their own people.<sup>1</sup> No wonder they were called sinners and publicans. The Pharisees taught that God would have absolutely nothing to do with the likes of him.

Their forgiveness, acceptance: wouldn't be fair. So, you'll understand what I mean when I say that Jesus went too far. He actually went up to Levi as he sat at his tax booth and that's where he called Levi to be his disciple. Then, he went into Levi's house and partied with his friends. It wasn't fair.

It was one thing to have common fishermen for disciples. But to cross this boundary? Jesus went too far.

I shouldn't have waited a year (or however long it was before I brought another group from Traverse City back to Detroit). I should have sat down, right then and there with the lady at the table, called the kids and the other adults to come back – forget the lunch we were going to have in Greek Town – and eat the soup that was about to be served.

...Because this is where the real feast would have been.

In Jesus' day the coming Kingdom of God was sometimes described as a great feast. I wonder if it would be the kind of dinner party at which there would be dancing.

Then, if dancing is movement that wells up from the spirit and, in sheer liberty, takes the hand of life itself to be its partner; if it's rising in the morning to raise hands to the sun and twirl for the sheer joy of life even in your inner spirit; if dancing is living and a part of the Great Feast of Heaven: how would you go about dancing with an enemy? How would you dance with someone who thinks you're the enemy?

Maybe that's what the lady was asking me to do. *Enemy* is not the way I would describe myself. But what if I – pastor or no, caring enough to visit Detroit or no –

represented a lot of what had made life mean for her: white man with a schedule to keep; money enough to bring a group of kids from the North; hurrying fast enough to not even see her? What if that was enough to make me appear like all the rest who didn't see her or her poverty?

Maybe she was asking the enemy to the banquet. Maybe she was going beyond what seemed fair to her and was asking me to dance.

If there's going to be dancing at the Great Heavenly Banquet, I wonder what kind of dancing it's going to be. Will it be a waltz? Or is it going to be a tango? Some two-step or perhaps the twist?

I think it'll be...break dance.

Break dance comes from *Hip Hop*, which they say that is as much a culture as it is a music form. It emerged from South Bronx in the '70's. It came as a release of creative energy, an alternative to the culture of violence that was destroying a generation of urban poor. The physical movement that accompanied this street music is known as *Break Dance*.<sup>2</sup> This was a new form of warfare, a different way of channeling competitive energy and replaced the gang warfare that had been tearing the cities apart for decades. *Hip Hop* and its expressions of graffiti and break dance are said to have saved a lot of kids from violent death. You might say for many, break dance is the dance of a good revolution.

For the life of me, I could not *Break Dance*. I know it's supposed to follow the laws of physics; but I see the contortions, the spinning on one hand with legs in the air extended straight out, back flips, moves called "suicide" and all the rest: I think I'd break something. So I resist.

...Like someone would resist if they were invited to dance with an enemy, or eat at table with them. They'd think they might break something.

But Jesus went too far this time. He crossed the line. He danced a good revolution. He went beyond doing what you'd think is fair and broke something when he went to an enemy and asked him to be friends. He went to Levi's house where there were other enemies and he "break-danced down" the barriers. He "break-danced down" the culture of violence with forgiveness, and the power of reconciling love.

The Pharisees cried “foul” like you and I cry “foul” when it’s suggested forgiveness and reconciliation might be given to those who have really done us harm.

You can either make people into enemies and spend your energy keeping them that way...or you can be like Jesus, go beyond what’s fair...and (metaphorically) dance. He said, “Love your enemies,” and break down the barriers that separate.

### Invitation

You might have enemies. If you do, you probably know who they are.

And you might be someone’s enemy – though learning that may come as a surprise. Our Lenten study author Ray Buckley writes, “We cannot undo our wrongs or the wrongs of others, but we can do what God enables us to do. We can open up the corners of our soul to the Spirit of God, speak the truth, do justice, and seek healing relationship.”<sup>3</sup>

I still remember my youth pastor reciting the poem:

He drew a circle that shut me out.  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win:  
We drew a circle that took him In!<sup>4</sup>

Drawing the bigger circle is going beyond what’s fair. It’s what Jesus did when he went over to Levi’s.

...and it’s what the lady did when she caught my sleeve.

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<sup>1</sup> M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew”, The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, vol. VIII. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press. © 1995. p 234.

<sup>2</sup> Well-documented articles on Break Dance and Hip Hop may be found on *Wikipedia*: “Hip Hop” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hip\\_hop\\_music](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hip_hop_music); and “B-boying” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B-boying>

<sup>3</sup> Ray Buckley, *Hard to Dance with the Devil on Your Back*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press © 2010. p 40.

<sup>4</sup> Edwin Marham, “Outwitted”, *The Shoes of Happiness and Other Poems*. Traditional copyright 1913.