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Is the Church a Marketplace?

Reflections [Crossing Every Boundary: God's Love for All People](#) 18 September 2026

Mark 6:56

I know this is a scandalous question to ask. I know that Jesus drove the money-changers out of the Temple. But before you hastily condemn me, let me put my question into its proper perspective.

The thought of markets and public places brings to mind a rather amusing incident from my late mother's life, which my elder daughter recounted to me recently. My mother had an obsession with cleanliness. (I confess that, as I was growing up, I found it demanding, and at times rebelled against it.) During one of her short journeys on the local train with my daughter, then five or six years old, she made sure the child touched nothing in the carriage, reminding her constantly that many unwell people would have sat there before them. As they left the railway station on arrival, my mother noticed a great many people crowding around the travellers, begging for alms. Panicking at the sight, she seized my daughter's hand to hurry her into a rickshaw. Feeling some resistance from the child, she turned to see what the trouble was — and realised, to her horror, that in her haste to get away, she had seized the hand of an unwashed, sniffing child from among the beggars!

Traditional markets and public places — I do not mean the smart markets and shopping malls — remain, the world over, dirty places. Venture into a busy traditional market, and you must be prepared to rub shoulders with sneezing, spitting, coughing humanity, foul of mouth as well as of manner. Ten people will have handled the fruit left uncovered before you buy your kilogram from the pile. Many an unwell and none-too-hygienic person will have tried on a shirt or a pair of sandals before you take one home. By the time you are through, you feel unclean yourself, and hurry home for a long, cleansing bath.

We read, "And whithersoever he entered, into villages, or cities, or country, they laid the sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as

touched him were made whole" (Mark 6:56). The crowd was dense with suffering humanity. Those who were well, who had come merely to witness a healing or a miracle, must have found it hard to avoid contact with such people.

Jesus radically departed from the attitude of people such as you and me. He demonstrated that holiness is not something diminished by contact with those we consider unworthy; holiness is something that pours out healing, reconciliation, love, compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance — even the very edge of His garment radiated all of this. He had no hesitation in touching those who were gravely ill, though, in His Divine nature, it was not even necessary for Him to touch them at all.

Most church congregations miss this valuable lesson from the healings Jesus performed. We are unhappy when people of other faiths walk in during our serene Sunday service. We frown when an unkempt person tries to sit beside us in the pew. We try to sit apart from them. I have heard fellow Christians rebuking people they judged not to be of their own class. But what, then, is our class? Do we realise that most of us are poorer, sicker, and more unclean within than those we shun? Do we realise that we hold no monopoly over the grace of Jesus? He is to be shared, not shut away in some imagined, safe locker. We cannot behave in church as we do in the marketplace, rushing in and out, trying to wash off every trace of the place from our skin, our hearts, and our minds.

I was struck by what Mark Buchanan wrote on the subject: that the market is a template for the church. The market is a classic in-between place, where cultures and classes come together — the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the good and the bad, the beautiful and the sordid. It is everyone's world in general, and no one's in particular.

Jesus inhabits such places without hesitation. He comes bringing healing. Show Him the slightest inclination to approach, and He will come running to you. When we picture Him in our minds, during our quiet times, let us imagine Him with His arms spread wide, ready to gather more and more people to Himself. He is boundless in compassion. He is unstoppable in redemption.

When the Kingdom of God that Jesus spoke of meets the world in which we live, His holiness will break down all our inhibitions, and build our inner being afresh. In that meeting, we have no right to treat anyone as untouchable. That is the pattern for our churches.

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