

Matt. 9:9-13

As Jesus was walking along, He saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and He said to him, “Follow Me.” And he got up and followed Him.

And as He sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with Him and His disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when He heard this, He said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection Questions

Context: The miracle stories in chapters 8 & 9 serve as the context for this story. Imbedded in these miracles stories (e.g. of healing, of casting out demons, of faith, of forgiveness of sins- covering the gamut of Christ's active ministry) is the theme of Jesus' sonship and the fact that His status as Son of God makes Him part of the Godhead. In the beginning of Chapter 9, Jesus offers a clear demonstration of His connection with God by forgiving the sins of the paralytic, which ignites a contentious response from the Scribes. They complain; 'this man is blaspheming' (by claiming to have the ability to forgive sins; a privilege reserved only for the Creator). They are angry that Jesus has placed Himself on par with God and are confused/suspicious about exactly who this person, Jesus is. In the midst of all the rest of the healing stories, we come to discover that the most profound healing of all is the healing of the soul that comes with the forgiveness of sins. As we will see in this passage, Jesus offers the most enduring form of healing (soul healing) to the most 'unlikely' people.

- 1) Jesus' call of Matthew reminds us of the way he called Simon and Andrew (Mt 4:18-22). Jesus calls and they get up and follow responding almost immediately, which probably speaks to how compelling His direct call is. When have you experienced being compelled to respond when He called you? Did you find yourself leaving other concerns behind in order to follow Him?
- 2) Jesus' call of Matthew although similar in its form, is, in a way, a radical departure from the call of the two fishermen. Fishing was a respectable profession; tax-collecting was not. The tax collectors were hired by the oppressors (the Romans) to collect money from their own people in order to support the workings of the Roman Empire. Whatever the tax collector collected (over and above the fee), was money that he could keep. The Jewish people had not forgotten the slavery of Egypt and considered anyone of their own people who would capitalize on their current "enslavement" a very low form of life. In fact, if a tax collector set foot in a house, it made the entire house "unclean". For Jesus to interact with such a person would have been shocking but to call such a person to follow Him was a *radical act*. How do we see Jesus continuing to call the "unlikely" person? How do we respond to that action of Jesus all around us?
- 3) An observant Jew would be expected to maintain ritual cleanliness (e.g. by not eating the wrong things and by not eating with the wrong people). Jesus deliberately crosses those boundaries to share table fellowship with sinners. For Jesus to sit down and share a meal with sinners and tax collectors demonstrated His full acceptance of them as broken people as He begins to lead them in a new way. His compassion for the "lost" is so great (see Luke Chp. 15) that He is

willing even to be mistaken for one of them. Do we have that radical compassion for the lost? In what way(s) is Jesus calling us to have that identification with the lost?

- 4) Throughout the gospels Jesus is continually meeting people where they are at as He calls them to the next place. His love for all of us sinners is so great that He is willing to meet us intimately in the midst of our own sin, as He invites us into greater holiness and wholeness. What disposes us to accept (or reject) this invitation of Christ? How do we live out this invitation for others?
- 5) Jesus' act of sharing table fellowship with sinners offends the Pharisees greatly and so they ask the disciples; "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" "Sinners" in this context could refer to anyone from a murderer to people who do not maintain ritual cleanliness (more likely the latter). Jesus responds on behalf of the disciples, stating plainly that He has not come to call those who are well, but those who are "in need of a physician". We hear the irony in this statement because we know that there is no person on this earth who is not in need of the Divine Physician. In what ways are we willing (or not) to admit and to name our brokenness so that we can avail ourselves of the best healing that our Divine Physician has to offer?
- 6) Jesus did not come to shame, but to heal and to save. He tells them that He desires "Mercy not sacrifice" because He has come to call "not the 'righteous' but sinners" (vv. 12-13). Again, we hear the irony here, there is no person who is perfectly 'righteous' in God's eyes. No person, no matter how holy and saintly is not in need of further conversion/sanctification. The Pharisees, because of their spiritual pride and their rigorous spiritual practices thought that they were completely righteous in God's eyes. This passage teaches us just how dangerous spiritual pride is! The Pharisees destroy their own opportunity to avail themselves of Jesus' healing power because, thinking they had no need of it, they do not have the presence of mind to ask for it (compare with John 9:39-41). When have we done this? We need not be ashamed to recognize that we are wounded sinners because this Truth empowers us to ask Jesus to gently heal the areas where we need healing. If we are aware of His Mercy and His desire to heal us, we will not fear bringing our woundedness to Him for healing. What is the correlation between our awareness of our own woundedness/frail humanity and a willingness to be merciful towards others? How can we let Jesus into our lives to reveal these things to us? How can we let Him be the Divine Physician for ourselves and for others?
- 7) Mercy vs. Sacrifice- Meditate on this theme as you pray with Hosea 6:1, 6 and Micah 6:8.