

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Matthew 9:9-17
“The Disruptive Call”

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(9th Sunday After Pentecost)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

IIB'1,2,3: MATTHEW 9:9-17 "THE DISRUPTIVE CALL"

Joy Of Mercy/Forgiveness (9:2-8)

9 **1) v.9 CALL OF MATTHEW: A TAX COLLECTOR (//Mk. 1:16-20, 2:13-14, Lk.5:27-28).**
 Customs Officer: Gentile Contact, Often Greedy, Excluded From Worship
a) v.9a Travel And Sight At Work. //4:18-22, Mk. 1:16-20, 3:18, Not All Are Fishermen!
 As Jesus passed on from there, From Capernaum, Omits Seaside Setting/Teaching (Mk. 2:13)
 he saw a man called 'Matthew' sitting at the tax (toll) office; Heb. Gift of God!, Levi, son of Alphaeus (Mk. 2:14)
 Acceptance/Love Precedes Repentance, Lk. 19:1-10, Lk. 3:13
b) v.9b Call To Follow (Without Promise, Mark 1:16-18). Radical Grace & Radical Demand
 and he said to him, "Follow me." Powerful Word! //4:19-21, 8:22, He Has Right To Intrude/Command
 Take Away Stigma, Jesus Is Compelling/Disruptive! 1) CALL TO NEW LIFE
c) v.9c Immediate Obedience. Priorities, Not Yet Any Explicit Confession/Repentance Except Obedience
 And he arose and followed him. Enough, 5th Disciple, A Disciple Is A Student/Apprentice/Understudy/Shadow

One = Key To Many, 3 Disciple Stories In Marcan Order

10 **2) vv.10-13 BANQUET WITH MATTHEW'S FRIENDS (//Mk. 2:15-17, Lk. 5:29-32).**
 8:3(Leper), 8:13(Gentile), 8:28(Demonized, Pigs), Sinner (9:2)
a) v.10 Jesus Loves And Eats With Sinners. 2) CALL TO NEW RELATIONSHIPS
 And as he sat (reclined) at table in the house, 26:20, Mt.'s House, To Host A Banquet = Accept Responsibility
 behold, many "tax collectors and sinners" came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. 8:11, Table Of Mercy
 Hillel, "The common people cannot be pious."
b) v.11 Pharisees Ask The Disciples A Question. Extortion, Perpetual Uncleanness
 And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, Pharisees Avoided Such Fellowship
 Q "Why does your teacher eat with "tax collectors and sinners?" Immersion Model, Object To Jesus' Joy
 No Quarantine! Preview Of Kingdom Banquet (8:11-12)
b') v.12 Jesus Answers The Question With A Medical Proverb + Comment.
 12 But when he heard it, he said, //8:16, Physical/Spiritual Healer, Stobaius 3.462.14
 (1) "Those who are well have no need of a physician, 3 Answers, Common Metaphor For A Teacher
but those who are sick. Sin-sick Soul, Holiness = Right Relationship With Jesus **MEDICAL PROVERB**
 Sirach 38:1-5, Sin = Disease, Holiness = Healing, Ps. 51:12-13
a') v.13 Jesus Loves Mercy And Calls Sinners (Hos. 6:1,6). Undermines Temple, Double Put-Down
 13 (2) Go and learn what this means, Offensive Intro., 5:7, Respond To God's Mercy In Jesus = Rightly Related To God
 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' Ceremony, Preference, 12:7, Mt.'s Addition: They Do Not Understand Scripture!
 (3) For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." Mission = I Came: Mk. 1:38, 10:45; Lk. 5:32 "to repentance"

14 **3) vv.14-17 FASTING AND NEW FORMS (//Mk. 2:18-22, Lk. 5:33-39).**
 Complain About Lack Of Asceticism, Party Boy
a) vv.14-17 The Question Of Fasting: Of Timing And Appropriateness. Apocalypse of Elijah 11:1
 14 1 Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, Not People (Mk.) But Disciples, What Jesus Is Doing Is New
 Q "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 6:16-18, Blessing Present! No Fasting
 22:2, 25:1-14, 2 Cor. 11:12, Eph. 5:23-33, Rev. 19:7-9, 21:2
 15 Q 2 And Jesus said to them, "Can the wedding guests (sons) mourn
 as long as the bridegroom is with them?" (No, Not If Understand) New WEDDING PROVERB
 12:28, Kingdom Time!, Is. 54:4-8, 61:10, 62:5
 2' The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, 28:20, Jesus: Bridegroom Is. 53:8
 v.15b = Allegory On v.15a
 1' and then they will fast." //6:1-18, Church Restores Fasting After Cross/Resurrection: Absence
 Wedding, Garment, Wine = Images Of Salvation, Eschatological/Kingdom Imagery
b) vv.16-17 New And Old: Forms And Consequences. Incompatible: Judaism vs. Kingdom In Jesus
 16 1 'And no one puts a piece of unshrunk (new) cloth on an old garment,' TEXTILE PROVERB
 No Patchwork Adaptation Of The Old World
 Piety Of My Disciples Reflects The New Reality!
 Everything Is New Now! Garment = Metaphor For World
 2 for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made
 3) CALL TO NEW KINGDOM FORMS
 17 1' 'Neither is new wine put into old wineskins'; Cloth Shrinks, Unfermented Wine Expands WINE PROVERB
 Fulfills Old In New Ways, Effervescent Good News Of Jesus!
 2' if it is, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; a-b//a'-b'
 but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved." 5:17-20, New Kingdom Realities

A Brief Treatment Of IIB' Matthew 9:9-17

Three paragraphs on discipleship (9:9, 10-13, 14-17) compose the fourth section of the essay on miracles and discipleship (8:1-9:35). That units on miracles (A. 8:1-17, C. 8:29-9:8, A' 9:18-38) alternate with units on discipleship (B. 8:18-27, B' 9:9-17) indicates Matthew sees the two as integral. The One who calls followers exercises God's rule through the Spirit over nature, the demonic, disease, and death. Jesus is Lord over all that afflicts us and sets the world right again. Whereas previous sections blended materials from Mark and Q, 9:9-17 follows the three paragraphs of Mark 2:13-14 (call of Matthew), 2:15-17 (meal with outcasts), 2:18-22 (fasting and new cloth/wine) with some editing for length. Mark's aphorisms are retained: 1) v.12 medical proverb, 2) v.15a wedding proverb, 3) v.16 textile proverb, 4) v.17 viticulture proverb. Jesus wove common sayings into his teaching to connect the new reality— God's reign— to daily life so there is both continuity and discontinuity in his presentation. The kingdom engages all that is true and insightful in this life. The word *disciples* is repeated (vv.10b, 11a, 14a, b). Matthew's highlighting phrase (*behold*) is only used once (v.10b) since his editing is slight. His added quote of Hosea 6:6 is important (v.13a); no one is to be sacrificed or written off; mercy is for all. If I was to organize the three paragraphs under a theme it would be *The Call To New Life in Jesus* (v.9), *The Call To New Relationships Through Jesus* (vv.10-13), *The Call To New Kingdom Forms Because Of Jesus* (vv.14-17).

Matthew's call parallels the call of two sets of fishermen brothers (4:18-22) in four parts; 1) Travel (v.9a), 2) Jesus notices (*sees*) a potential disciple (v.9b), 3) a call to *Follow me* is issued (v.9b), 4) obedience is noted (v.9c). Our toll collector may have had two names— *Matthew* and *Levi* (Mk. 2:14), or *Matthew* may be a nickname like *Petros* for Peter since in Hebrew it means *gift of God*. Revenue agents interacted with unclean Gentiles at border crossings; because they were ultimately agents of Rome and had a license to extort, they were despised. That Jesus calls a religious and political traitor into his symbolic community of twelve is a scandal. It was the finest education and the most transformative experience ever offered, so if it comes your way, don't miss the opportunity. The risen Jesus is still disrupting lives.

Remember the insight: *the one is the key to the many*. With Matthew comes a network of associates and a motley crew of *sinners*. Scene two finds them all at a banquet, presumably at Matthew's home to meet his new rabbi. The surface structure is a 4:2 concentric pattern (a-b//b'-a') with *sinners* as an inclusion (v.10//v.13) and a question (b. v.11) and answer (b' v.12) at the center. The village Pharisees observe the party and ask the disciples about Jesus' unsavory associations since to eat with someone implies acceptance. Jesus responds with a proverb that places him in the role of a doctor, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick," the question being, Who's sick? It is the local rabble who feast in Jesus' presence, or the Pharisees who miss the party? That the barb is for the Pharisees is clear in v.13a where he sends the party of biblical holiness off to study Hosea 6:6, then states his mission clearly, "For I came not to call the righteous but sinners." Jesus calls Pharisees as well. It's a new day.

The freshness of Jesus kingdom vision is evinced in a lack of fasting in contrast with two other serious renewal groups: John's disciples, the Pharisees. Such typically fasted twice a week; Jesus not at all after his wilderness trials, the reason being his ministry is a joyful wedding, a time to feast and not fast. But when he is *taken away*, fasting will return as a sign of mourning and longing during Jesus' long absence before his return. The new reality calls for new forms of spiritual response, and if we go with the new thing (Jesus), the best of the old is also preserved (5:17). Lively new realities require new forms.



THE DISRUPTIVE CALL

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”

Jesus the healer spoke well of physicians.

M A T T H E W 9 : 1 2

A crowd gathered at a Chicago rail station one afternoon in 1953. They awaited the arrival of the Nobel Peace Prize winner for 1952. Out stepped a giant of a man, six feet four, bushy hair, large mustache. Cameras flashed. City officials approached with hands outstretched, saying how honored they were. The guest politely thanked them; then, looking over their heads, asked if he could be excused. He quickly walked through the crowd till he reached an elderly African American woman struggling with two suitcases. He picked up the bags and— with a smile— escorted her to a bus where he helped aboard and wished her a safe journey. He then returned, “Sorry to have kept you waiting.” A member of the reception committee said to a reporter, “That’s the first time I ever saw a sermon walking.”¹

The man was Dr. Albert Schweitzer, missionary physician, then seventy-eight years old. He’d first made a name for himself in Europe as a Bible scholar, theologian, and world class organist. He then discovered an appetite for medicine, dropped everything, went back to school, and established a hospital in Lambarene, Gabon where he died at age ninety in 1965. In 1906 Albert Schweitzer published his review of research into the historical Jesus. He ended the book with a word of testimony that is among the finest Christian invitations I’ve encountered. He writes:

"He comes to us as one unknown... as of old, by the lake-side. He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal Himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an

¹ B. Cavanaugh, *More Sower’s Seeds* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 47-48.

ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is."²

Sometimes people ask, "Phil, how did your call come?" The simplest answer is I was drafted. For a fuller answer I have to tell at least six stories:

- 1) first, my baptism on Easter 1954 when Christ said Yes to me in the sacrament and my parents made promises to raise me in the faith;
- 2) my confirmation at age twelve in 1966 when I took for myself the vows my parents had taken for me at my baptism;
- 3) a late-adolescent crisis conversion at age eighteen in July 1972 when I said Yes to Jesus as an adult follower and became a disciple;
- 4) a particular call to ordained ministry one Sunday in the spring of 1975 when Jesus offered me a call to preach and serve while sitting in Calvary Baptist Church in Winston Salem;
- 5) the formal approval and ordination of the United Methodist Church over a period of eight years of study and supervision; and finally,
- 6) saying a daily *Yes* to the call, its privileges and demands, "Follow me...."

I've told each of these so many times they've have taken on a standard form, each having a long and short version depending on how much folk want to listen. A call has a turning point, but there's also the preparation of the Holy Spirit that comes before, as well as all that follows to test and confirm the call, just as the *I do* of a wedding is preceded by the romance and followed by the story of the marriage. My *Yes* to the call of Christ had a prequel of preparation and a sequel that continues to this day. Mine is a call from within the church; to some it's a call from outside, and we need both, those who are deeply marinated in the faith and those with fresh eyes.

I'm sure Matthew was often asked, "How did it start, Matthew? Rumor is you were once had a government license for collecting tolls and taxes in Capernaum? Were you really once a Jewish traitor and Roman collaborator?"

"Yes, but something happened at the toll booth when Jesus walked by with four fishermen: Peter and Andrew, James and John. I went to work one morning; that evening I was off on a new adventure with four guys who hated my guts. For the past half-century I've been a follower and now a biographer of Jesus in a second edition

² Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1968), 403.

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of Mark’s gospel.³ And to think, it all started at the toll booth with my books open and Herod’s guards standing by. Jesus walked up, and my old life ended.”

In response to such questions, Matthew would tell the story of his call, the short version we have before us this morning. It’s bare bones and would have been filled out in conversation. Everyone should be able to tell their call story, how Christ claimed them, and not all of them are dramatic, though some are. You tell your story, answer questions, and leave the rest to the Spirit. It’s how the faith spreads. Bragging on Jesus is what we mean by evangelism; it’s sharing good news.⁴

THE ATTACHMENT OF MAKING DISCIPLES

Universities– at least in the modern sense of free-standing institutions dedicated to teaching and research– have only been with us since the eleventh and twelfth centuries and came from the Catholic Church, beginning in Bologna and Paris. Prior to that, learning was passed on in companionship with a natural philosopher or spiritual director. It was an apprenticeship; class was never dismissed. You lived in close quarters since the goal was not just to impart knowledge but to impart the wisdom and habits which embodied the master’s teaching. Information was for the sake of formation in a way of seeing the world and living in it. It was more like military training, the goal of which is to turn out soldiers, not just military historians.⁵

This is the New Testament meaning of *disciple*; you are an understudy of Jesus at his invitation.⁶ He the caller, you the called; he the teacher, you the pupil; he the

³ Michael F. Bird, *The Gospel of the Lord* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), Chapter 4, “The Literary Genetics of the Gospels,” 125-220.

⁴ For a fresh telling, see N.T. Wright, *Simply Good News* (San Francisco, NY: HarperOne, 2015).

⁵ On discipleship in the ancient world, see Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1984), Fernando F. Segovia (ed.), *Discipleship in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985). Worth reading is Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’ Essential Teachings On Discipleship* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006) and Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Spring, CO: IVP, 2006).

⁶ On ancient discipleship as summons or attraction, see Charles Talbert, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 74; Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark* (Macon, GA: Smyth

leader, you the follower; he the source of proverbs and parables, you the memorizer; he the great physician putting lives back together, you the resident making daily rounds at bedsides, and all around men and women in the same traveling program of character and world view transformation through living at the edge of the new reality: God’s kingdom in Jesus as empowered by the immediacy of the Spirit. It was a factory for a new kind of human being: a Christian.

It was life on the road with rabbi Jesus; no two days were the same,⁷ and the call was deeply inter-personal, “Follow *me*. Watch *me*. Listen to *me*.” It was personal allegiance and attachment, not to a program but to the One who embodied the new reality.⁸ Other teachers pointed to truths outside themselves; Jesus was the truth and the way and the life and pointed to himself without apology.⁹ To be a disciple— then and now— is *to learn Jesus*, and in the end not just to believe things *about him* (correct theology) or to merely believe *in him* (personal faith) but to *believe what he believed*, to see life through his eyes,¹⁰ and this makes disciples dangerous and creative people. To catch a glimpse of how he sees changes all.

Each day in front of their eyes the kingdom of the Father was unfolding through Jesus the Son in the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ They ate together, slept in homes and under the stars, laughed and cried together, had the best and worst in their lives put on display, prayed together, made pilgrimage to Jerusalem together. In Jesus the triune mystery of God was on daily display at ground level,

& Helwys, 2000), 16-18, 25.

⁷ For the presentation of a typical Sabbath, see Mark 1:21-34.

⁸ David Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2006), Chapter 1, “The Practice of Radical Attachment,” 23-56. For insight into the shaping power of childhood and mentor attachments, see David Brooks, *The Social Animal* (New York, NY: Random House, 2011), Chapter 5, “Attachment,” 56-71. On attachment theory, Dr. Tim Clinton & Dr. Gary Sibcy, *Attachments: Why You Love, Act, Feel the Way You Do* (Brentwood, TN: Integrity, 2002).

⁹ John 14:6.

¹⁰ Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship*, 39; John Baggett, *Seeing Through The Eyes of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

¹¹ For a fresh reading of the kingdom, see Scot McKnight, *Kingdom Conspiracy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2014).

though it would take the church three centuries to work out the intellectual details of the doctrine.¹² Jesus’ strategy was to make disciples, to invest deeply in a few, then to loose them on the world in the Spirit’s power to do the same till every piece of the human mosaic was infected.¹³ This faith has immense intellectual and spiritual treasures, but it is best passed on as one life rubs against another in the midst of daily living and a shared mission. It’s as much caught as taught. Only a disciple can make a disciple, and in giving us the book that bears his name, Matthew lays out the life that marks one as a follower of the One who called him that day at the toll booth. Albert Schweitzer said of such meetings: “In everyone’s life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.”¹⁴ Jesus did that— kindled an inner fire— in everyone who said Yes to him.

Another image might be an umbilical cord in which a small person under formation— a foetus— is within the mother, drawing life from her. They are distinguishable but inseparable. A new life lives within the circle of the mother. The disciples were now joined to the life of Jesus, called inside his dynamic sphere, and maybe this is why the image of *being born again* has such intuitive power. We’ve all been once born, but what if we could be *born again* into a new world and have eyes to see the kingdom of God? “Follow me,” he said to four fishermen, “and I will make you fishers of men.” New world. “Follow me,” he said to Matthew, “and I will show you how to gather into God’s treasury.” New word. Jesus met them in in the workplace and hooked their deepest hopes, the things they dreamed about and told no one. The moment came when he crossed their path in divine timing, and however many turned him down, twelve eventually said Yes and became a living symbol of new Israel. Twelve tribes, twelve apostles. The grace and call of God are persuasive, not coercive. To say *No*, and to say it all your life, is always an option, one God zealously guards. But to be attached to him as a follower means new life.

¹² For a review of early historical development, see Roger E. Olson & Christopher Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), Chapter 1, “The Trinity: Patristic Contributions,” 15-50; for an introduction, see Jason Byasse, *Trinity: The God We Don’t Know* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2015).

¹³ On the strategy of investing in a few to reach the many, see Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2003), Chapter 3, “Why Jesus Invested in a Few,” 59-74; the classic here is Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan Of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1993).

¹⁴ Found at <http://www.stbarts.org/sermons/ser122404.html>.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

1) v.9 The Call Of Matthew: A Tax Collector.

It is interesting that in the first three gospels the call of Matthew, or Levi as Mark calls him,¹⁵ is separated in time from the call of the first four. Matthew is number five. The first four were two set of brothers– fishermen from Capernaum– my guess is they were all as kosher as Peter who once announced to the Lord he’d “...never eaten anything that is common or unclean.”¹⁶ Strict Jews, all of them, concerned about contact with Gentiles and looking for the day when political freedom would be restored. Even after the resurrection they continued to ask partisan questions, as in the first chapter of Acts, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom *to Israel?*”¹⁷

The reason the call of the first four is separated in time from the fifth is that they lived in the same town– Capernaum– but in different worlds. Matthew was everything they were not. Each day he was in contact with Gentiles and therefore perpetually unclean. The monies he collected on goods entering Herod’s territory ultimately went to the Roman forces of occupation; *tax collectors* was a term synonymous with cheating and extortion.¹⁸ Matthew sold out his heritage for a lucrative job working for the enemy. Take the words *quisling, collaborator, sell-out, low-life scum, carpet-bagger, traitor, backslider*, and if you add them all together, you may still not have achieved the emotional intensity of what Matthew represented to men like Peter. Some, it seems, are so motivated by money that almost no line of work is beyond them. They sear their consciences and plow ahead despite how it pushes them to the margins of respectability in every town and city.

My guess is Matthew was such a man. The Romans and their underlings ran the world; better *to go along in order to get along*, put aside faith and its moral inconveniences for a sure thing. Ever known someone like that? I have. And you know what? Jesus Christ cares as much for them as for those of us whose jobs

¹⁵ Mark 2:13-14.

¹⁶ Acts 10:14.

¹⁷ Acts 1:6.

¹⁸ Darrell Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 112-113.

contribute to community welfare and who live inside the boundaries of conventional morality. Jesus loves nice sinners like us, and he loves sleazy, low-life sinners as well. Only difference is the smell. One uses perfume to hide the odors of sin; the other stinks in public and doesn't care any more. That was Matthew and his entire network of tax collectors and good-time buddies, what Matthew calls *sinners*. The first time Matthew sat behind the tax table it was hard, but every day after that it got easier. Peter would spit on the ground after paying the fees. "Coward," he would think to himself. "Sucker," Matthew would think to himself in return.

For Jesus to be directed by the Spirit to call such a one as Matthew, as is implied in the report that Jesus *saw a man named Matthew*, just as he earlier *saw Peter and Andrew*,¹⁹ was a scandal. Apparently Jesus touched in Matthew the same deep nerve as in the first four. Now there are five followers: four loyal Jewish fishermen, one sell-out. Jesus did not ask their permission before he called Public Enemy No. 1. They walked off from boats and nets; Matthew walked off from account books and a lucrative collections business. They left honorable jobs, he a dishonorable. Theirs was the politics of ritual purity and fervent Jewish hope, his the politics of personal compromise. They came as two pairs of brothers; Matthew came alone. Jesus has the right to draw disciples from inside and outside our well-monitored boundaries. He wants us to find unity in him, not in our politics or economics or race or history or social placement or in any of the ways we normally divide up the world into *us and them*. A father in Portland tells this story:

"Soccer was starting. My tiny, 5-year-old daughter would play for the Bombers. I was anxious to see who the coach was. My first impression was that Ray was a good man. Any doubts vanished when an incident occurred during a practice game: white shirts versus blue. An olive skinned boy who spoke no English wandered from the playground to the sidelines.... Moments later he was gone. There were now thirteen Bombers running down the field. The boy, perfectly camouflaged in blue shorts and a white t-shirt, had joined the white team. He ran, he kicked, he smiled. No one yet said, 'He hasn't paid the fees! The forms have not been signed!' A ball rolled into a mother's lap, and as the new boy ran to fetch it, she innocently said, 'He's not on the team.' The coach looked down at the now very dirty boy, saying, 'He's not? Hmm.' The boy looked up at Ray, who held his soccer fate, at least this day. He

¹⁹ 4:18-22.

put his hand on the boy's small back and said, 'Come on! Let's play soccer!' And off all thirteen Bombers ran."²⁰

None of us deserve to be on God's team. Yet, in his mercy, Jesus calls us. Ours is to consent and learn to work out our differences with everyone else he calls to follow him. It's not our private club; it's his church. Believers who separate themselves from other believers for political or racial or class or regional or educational differences are sinning. Something's wrong with churches where everyone looks and thinks alike. Jesus took the polarities of his day and the deep hatreds within Capernaum and deliberately inserted them into the daily mix of discipleship. He controls the guest list, not us. Until Matthew was called, the first four thought God only loved fishermen! We get to say Yes or No to Christ, but he does not trust us to decide who we serve alongside. He calls us to a kingdom zone beyond our comfort zone, and if we refuse, we lose. Following Jesus looked great till Matthew signed up. Now it was about politics and money and ugly history and the meaning of being a real Jew. It's only one verse, but it vibrates with energy, "As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him."

The Wesleyan Covenant Prayer we use the first Sunday of each year contains a loaded petition, "I am no longer my own, but thine. *Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.*"²¹ Following Christ means spending time and building relationships with people who are unlike you in every way except commitment to Jesus.²² The disciples were all alike until Levi came aboard. They were oil; he was water, and Jesus was the emulsifier that held them together. The church is not Burger King; you don't get it your way; I don't get it my way. We don't set the guest list or menu. It's not a democracy; it's about discipleship. *We follow him*, and we do it together. Our only vote is whether to say Yes or Not when Jesus taps us on the shoulder, "Hey you, follow me; watch me turn you into something different. Beneath the accumulated crud, I see something I like. Let's hang out together."

"But what about those other four guys," said Levi, "They hate me."

²⁰ Edited from PreachingToday.com search under Matthew 9:9-17.

²¹ "A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition," *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: the United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), No. 607.

²² For a full court defense, see Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015).

“Let me work that out,” said Jesus. “One day, you’ll love these guys. Stick with me.” He did, and the first gospel bears his name. Pretty good resume!

2) vv.10-13 A Banquet With Matthew’s Friends.

A missionary sat on the patio watching a black ant crawl up a table leg until it reached some spilled sugar. It seemed to eat, then crawled back down. Soon two black ants crawled up the table leg. They ate and left. A steady steam soon moved up and down the table leg, and the missionary thought, "They must have some system by which to communicate, 'I've found something good and want to share it!'"²³

Verse 10 raises the question, *Who followed who?* or— for those who want the grammar correct— *Who followed whom?* Matthew leaves his career and follows Jesus, but apparently Jesus also follows Matthew, because in the next scene that’s just where we find him, at a great party in Matthew’s home. Not only are all Matt’s tax buddies invited but all sorts of outsiders as well. It’s a rogues gallery, or as the official guest list read, *tax collectors and sinners*, which in this case means people who do not bother to keep up even the appearances of Jewish morality and faith. If you listen carefully, you won’t hear hymns in the background, more like Willie Nelson and Hank, Jr., with a bit of ZZ Top thrown in. Wine flowing, laughter loud; Jesus is at ease, leaning on his left arm on one of the couches placed around the edges of the room, and Peter asks himself, “How did I end up in a honky-tonk?” though it’s still the same village. These are the neighbors Peter’s been avoiding. Those who have answered the call to follow all mixed in with folk whose only connection with Jesus is that their old buddy *Matthew* has *gotten religion* and invited them over to meet his new rabbi. I love it. It’s why what happens in your kitchen and back yard around the grill is perhaps more important for the growth of this church than what we do on Sunday mornings. Inviting people into your home is an invitation to *window shop* the faith by taking a closer look at your life. We are their Bible.

It’s interesting who the complainers were, the church folk, the Pharisaic Jews who were serious about holy living and avoiding sin, so they asked his disciples, “Why does *your teacher* eat with tax collectors and sinners?” They knew what such a meal meant; it meant Jesus was taking responsibility for these people. And rather than have the disciples fumble about for an answer, Jesus takes up the challenge by quoting a proverb about where healers are found, “Those who are well have no need

²³ PreachingToday.com search under Mt. 9:9-17.

of a physician, but those who are sick.” Dr. Jesus is where he should be, tending to sin-sick souls, waiting for a chance to tell a story. And while his healings were non-medical— being the direct action of the Holy Spirit on human flesh— Jesus shows appreciation for the work of doctors by applying the analogy to himself.²⁴

If we are not as at ease with lost people as the Lord was, something’s amiss. A faith that must be hidden and protected in a hothouse of holiness is fragile. Spending all your time with Christians— as most of us pastors do to keep the machinery running— is the death of vital Christianity. Jesus refused to be insulated. He was as comfortable in the marketplace and in a tax collector’s home as in a synagogue pulpit. Don’t ask me how many church meetings I attend; ask me how many friendships I’m building with those who are not-yet-Christian. And the sad answer is not many at all. Jesus was at home with the honky-tonk crowd. He knew how to line dance and the lyrics to every song on the juke box. His was a happy holiness that drew people towards him rather than pushed them away. To be near him was to have your insides vibrate with the love of God, and he was against anything that kept people away from his presence, whether it was the disciples telling parents he was too busy for children or Pharisees criticizing Matthew’s guest list.

Verse 13 is more than good advice. It is, when properly understood, a three-part challenge, and highly offensive. “Go and learn what this means” was a stock phrase rabbis used when speaking to students.²⁵ They judge Jesus as morally lax; he treats them as beginners who need a biblical homework assignment. He quotes Scripture because they do not understand even the basics of God’s character, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” Then, for him to cap it off with a statement of personal mission, “*I came* not to call the righteous, but sinners,” leaves them wondering which group they are: the righteous or sinners? Jesus refused to live in the safety of a holy huddle. The church has medicine in the cabinet to heal the hurts of a fallen world. Open your hearts. Open your homes. Mix it up with different sorts of people. Enjoy their company. Give up judging; acceptance is not the same as endorsement. Let them experience through you the One you love and follow. Those who draw near to

²⁴ On Jewish attitudes toward physicians, see the positive view of Sirach 38:1-15. For a history, see Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford, England: Oxford Press, 2005); for a treatment by a British physician, John Wilkinson, *The Bible And Healing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); also Hector Avalos, *Health Care and the Rise of Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Henrickson, 1999).

²⁵ John P. Meier, *Matthew* (Wilmington, DEL: Michael Glazier, 1980), 94.

Jesus are rightly related to God— whatever their history— and those who hold Jesus at arms length to protect their religion are not right with God.

The sad rule of thumb is this: the longer you're a Christian, the less effective you are in reaching others. Sounds counter-intuitive, but studies show it's true. Lost people have lots of lost friends, so that when they come to Christ— and perhaps for a much as a year after that— they are positioned to reach deep into their social network as salt and light. They haven't yet been *churchified* and traded in their lost friends for church friends. But over time something happens. They lose touch with their social network, partly because they no longer feel comfortable with the habits and lifestyle of their old circle. They can easily become judgmental and take on airs of superiority. And, if they do not swim against the tide, they find themselves locked inside a flurry of church activities and far from the mission field that starts at their own back door. Every new believer is a gold mine of possible contacts, and the tragedy is that we do nearly nothing to mine it as Jesus did at this dinner party.

“Say Matthew, now that you're my follower, invite all your friends over for a first class party. You pick up the tab. I'll just love on them a while. It will be fun to watch what happens.” Verse 10 is what it looked like after the invitation went out: “And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples.” The kingdom of God is on display at a cocktail party with Jewish backsliders! How cool is that?

Church is intimidating for lots of folks, particularly if they grew up outside the stained-glass barrier. Starting in your living room and around your table is a whole lot safer. From time to time we hear statistics about how people first came to faith and church membership. The Institute for American Church Growth asked ten thousand people about their pilgrimage. What led them in? The answers were: Special need, 2 percent; Walk-in, 3 percent; Pastor, 6 percent; Visitation, 1 percent; Sunday school, 5 percent; Evangelistic crusade, 5 percent; Programs, 3 percent; *Friend or relative, 79 percent.* Let your light shine near enough that people feel the love. Then watch what the Lord does. Each of you is in contact with five or more people who do not know Christ or have a church home. How many people would that be? You do the math, because you're the sales force, not me. I'm just the closer!

3) vv.14-17 Fasting And New Forms.

Knowledge is important, but timing is everything. Fasting was one of the classic spiritual disciplines of Jewish life. Only one fast, on the Day of Atonement, was

required each year, but additional fasts were practiced in times of personal and national crisis, with some groups adding twice weekly fasting as a means of demonstrating the seriousness of their prayers. Fasting says that my hunger for God's presence is more important than my hunger for food. My ordination vows require it. To fast is to humble yourself and risk having all your dependencies uncovered. The parallel discipline to fasting is feasting, which is taking joy in God's presence and the abundance of God's good gifts. To refrain at the right time is a discipline, and to party at the right time is also a discipline. So the question is, What time is it?

In Jewish villages, weddings were a week long party with the best food and drink. It would be extremely bad manners to fast on such occasions. That Jesus turned water into the best wine for such a feast is a demonstration of his sense of timing in the matter.²⁶ The Jews had a very earthy and honest appreciation of the joys of marriage. The relationship between a groom and bride was so honored it became an image for the relationship of God and his people: the Lord was the groom and his people the bride, and one day there will be a grand wedding banquet as heaven and earth embrace each other.²⁷ For Jesus to speak of himself as bridegroom is a Messianic claim. The reason he and his followers are not fasting is because Jesus' ministry is a time for feasting. Not a time to mourn because God is absent but a season of joy because God is manifestly present in Jesus. It's kingdom time; it's party time: sins are forgiven, outcasts welcomed home, the sick healed, demons expelled. Turn up the music; start popping corks! But *the days will come*, Jesus promised, and they did come three years later one fine Spring Friday, when the *bridegroom is taken away from them*, and in that time of the Lord's absence, which we have now been in for two thousand years, fasting is restored in the church.

We fast and deny ourselves because there is much to mourn in this world, and the Lord is physically absent. We identify with the pain and groaning of this world through fasting and other forms of self-denial. Fasting is what we do to repent and *seek the presence*; feasting is what we do when we are *in the presence*. Fasting is for dry spells; feasting for when the Spirit pours down a deluge of blessing and power. We are now in a season of fasting, when the Lord's presence is most noticeable by its absence. I long for a fresh visitation and an open heavens; till then I will fast, and I invite you to do the same. It is with some envy that I read reports from other parts

²⁶ John 2:1-12.

²⁷ e.g. Is. 54:4-5, 61:10, 62:5

of the world where the spiritual atmosphere is more like a wedding.²⁸ I love reports of miracles and healings and conversions. And I wonder:

“Lord, when will you visit us again? We hate to complain, but we feel like a jilted bride. Where are you? When do we get invited to the party? When will the new wine flow from heaven again?”

Jesus did not come to patch up the old world but bring the new. Because of who he is, he has the right to tell us what will and will not work. That is the purpose of the two proverbs about the new patch on the old garment and the new wine in old wineskins. Fermenting wine explodes stiff old containers. New and old cloth are incompatible. Jesus is Judaism 2.0. Which means that the church cannot simply be the society for the careful preservation of the traditions of the last century. This church is keen on tradition, and that’s good; it’s gives identity and stability. Are we also open to new forms and new styles of doing church? What new wineskins is the Lord offering us to contain the new wine he’s sending?

CONCLUSION

I don’t have a lot of answers today, just longing and emptiness, and a need for a fresh personal adventure with the One who said, “Follow me,” a hunger to be the kind of church where all sorts of odd outsiders and smooth insiders find a way into the love of God. I can point to it, pray and fast for it, but I cannot make it happen because it’s not about technique or a snappy new program or the last book I read. We are talking about kingdom stuff, Holy Spirit generated life, a gift from God. “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, here on earth as it already is in heaven where you rule is unchallenged.” There are just some things the Lord reserves to himself.

Have you heard his call today? *Follow me*. What will you do about it? What does it mean that he crossed your path? If you answer *Yes*, and if you start walking behind him in the company of others, it will wreck your life. It did for Matthew and the rest. Are you ready for something new?

²⁸ For a fascinating treatment, see Phillip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South* (New York, Oxford, 2006)
