



June 11, 2023 Matthew 9: 9-13, 18-26; Genesis 12:1-9

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

Choosing Matthew to be one of the disciples must have really challenged the other disciples. Imagine today including a traitorous spy in your business. This is equivalent to what Jesus is doing here. Then imagine an official of an occupying oppressive power begging your CEO for help and they accept this request. Then go further and experience this person you have given much importance in your life, stopping to help cure an AIDS person from a slum part of town. By now you may want to quietly disappear from the crowd and go home disgusted and disappointed. Yet, something keeps you hanging in there. What is it?

Matthew 9: 9:13, 18-26:

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named **Matthew** sitting at the **tax collector's** booth. "**Follow me,**" he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

10 While Jesus was having dinner at **Matthew's** house, many **tax collectors** and "**sinners**" came and **ate** with him and his **disciples**. 11 When the **Pharisees** saw

this, they asked his **disciples**, "Why does your **teacher** eat with tax collectors and '**sinners**'?" 12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the **healthy** who need a doctor, but the **sick**. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire **mercy**, not **sacrifice**.' For I have not come to call the **righteous**, but **sinners**."

(Revised Common Lectionary added verses)

18 While he was saying this, a **ruler** came and **knelt** before him and said, "My **daughter** has just **died**. But come and put your hand on her, and she will **live**." 19 Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his **disciples**.

20 Just then a **woman** who had been subject to bleeding for **twelve years** came up behind him and **touched** the edge of his **cloak**. 21 She said to herself, "If I only **touch** his **cloak**, I will be healed."

22 Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, **daughter**," he said, "your faith has **healed** you." And the **woman** was **healed** from that moment.

23 When Jesus entered the **ruler's** house and saw the flute players and the noisy **crowd**, 24 he said, "Go away. The **girl** is not **dead** but asleep." But they **laughed** at him. 25 After the **crowd** had been put outside, he went in and took the **girl** by the hand, and she **got up**. 26 News of this spread through all that region.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Jesus responded with compassion to the ruler and the sick woman. In both cases, life was restored to the ones in need.

Have you ever gone to Jesus on behalf of someone you loved who was in need of restoration? What caused you to do this?

PRAYER: Lord, no matter where I turn there are so many needs. You too have had this same situation in story after story in the gospels. I search for the ways you responded to those needs for clues that might help me as I too try to respond with care. Help me to encounter each person with full attention as you did, so that God's love can freely flow through me as well. Help me also to graciously accept help when I need it. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

MATTHEW: When Jesus gathered up his twelve disciples he chose people from all walks of life and all levels of acceptance in society. Matthew as a tax collector, had connections with the foreign dominating powers of the day. *How might this connection affect Matthew's ability to say yes to Jesus' invitation? If you had been one of the other disciples, how might this challenge you?*

TAX COLLECTORS/ SINNERS: If someone wanted to be "beyond the pale" they would become a tax collector. They would be seen as a traitor, and oppressor of their own people. *Why do you think Jesus offered Matthew the chance to follow him given the despised role he played in his society?*

PHARISEES / RIGHTEOUS: The Pharisees were often examples of those who were "holier than thou" in Jesus' day. Their righteousness came from their own self-evaluation. *Have you ever had to deal with someone whose own self-evaluation seemed to put them beyond question/change? What was that like? Have you ever been that person?*

FOLLOW ME: To follow someone is to go where they are going. Jesus is inviting Matthew to go with him into Jesus' reality. *What kind of insight or attraction must have driven Matthew to do such a radical thing? Have you ever been a 'Matthew'?*

ATE: To invite someone to eat with you in Jesus' day implied total acceptance as a peer. *Could this be the motivator for Matthew when he accepted Jesus' call to follow him?*

MERCY: Mercy is the grace filled expression of strength towards one who is in need of something. *How does this challenge the Pharisees notion of a God who seems to require sacrifice?*

SACRIFICE: It was thought that if a person was willing to give up something precious to them (e.g. Abraham/Isaac), God could be moved to be merciful. *How does Jesus challenge this belief in this story?*

HEALTHY / HEALED / LIVE: Over and over in many ways, Jesus teaches that God's will is our well-being. We are created to have life and have it to the fullest. *What is Jesus teaching us about his reason for having become one of us in these examples?*

TOUCH / TOUCHED: Touch has the ability to transfer both good and bad energy. Jesus constantly uses touch to reveal that when God touches it is only for our good. *What has been your most common experience of being touched? Do you welcome being touched, or do you simply tolerate being touched? Why do you respond the way you do to touch?*

SICK / DEAD / DIED: Illness and death were so present to everyone in the days of Jesus. Life for children and women was especially precarious, and often very short. *What is Jesus teaching when he reaches out to this girl and this woman?*

DAUGHTER / WOMAN: Now we encounter the second least valued person in those days; a woman who is afflicted with something that separates her from her community and her worship. She was considered 'unclean'. She has been searching for wholeness as long as the little girl above has been alive.



What connections do you make between these two females? Why do you think the community of Mark valued these miracles so much as to include them in the gospel? What is being said about Jesus' God in these stories?

GIRL / DAUGHTER: In the times of Jesus, the value of a person often resided in their being someone who could enrich the family system. Girl children were of the least value in this civilization.

What would the women and children of Jesus' day made of this episode? Does it have anything to say to any of the questions of our day?

RULER / One translation uses the word official in place of ruler. In either case, the man was someone who was taking a significant risk coming to Jesus who was now being seen as threatening to the status quo; all this for the sake of a daughter, who in those days was the least in importance in the value system of the day.

What does this tell you about the official? Do you like this man? What does this tell you about Jesus?

CROWD: Crowds often were attracted to Jesus because they were composed of people who were searching for something. They became a problem for Jesus because the status quo feared crowds.

Is this the same today? Can you give an example of a crowd recently that became a problem for the status quo? Have you ever been in such a crowd? If so, what do you remember about the experience?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 9: 9-13 // Mk. 2: 14-17; Lk. 5:27:32; Mt. 12:7; Mt. 9:18-26 // Mk. 5:22-43; Lk. 8: 41-56; Mt. 9:21 // Mt. 14:36; Num. 15:37; Acts 19:12;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Hos. 6: 3-6; Ps. 50: 1, 8, 12-15; Rom. 4: 18-25; Mt. 9:9-13; Revised Common Lectionary: Gen. 12:1-9; Ps. 33: 1-12; Rom. 4: 13-25; Mt. 9: 9-13, 18-26;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

“Matthew, for example, takes offence at the drastic way with which Mk. 5:27ff. Told the healing of the woman with the hemorrhage. The idea that the garments of the miracle worker communicate divine power, which leaps forth and is capable of healing, is a vulgar Hellenistic notion that appears in exactly this way in the account of Peter’s healing shadow and Paul’s miraculous handkerchief (Acts 5:15; 19:12) and later shapes the cult of relics. Matthew corrects this magical view by making the cure take place no longer through the touching of the garment as such, but through Jesus’ word of power. He reduces in general the broad depiction of the miracle stories in Mark, which reveal a novelistic joy in narrative, and where even motifs of profane narrative technique are sounded, in the strongest way, in order to place a stronger emphasis on the mysterious grandeur of Jesus.”

E. Kasemann, *Bgründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche? Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen I* 1960) PP. 214-34.

A parallel reading to Mt. 9:10-13 in the Vimalakirtinirdesha Sutra 2, we find the Buddha (circa 600 BCE) teaching: “The Bopdhissattva made his appearance at the fields of sports and in the casinos, but his aim was always to mature those people who were attached to games and gambling. To train living beings, he would appear at crossroads and street corners. To demonstrate the evils of desire, he even entered the brothels. To establish drunkards in correct mindfulness, he entered all the taverns.

Borg, Marcus, Riebert, Ray. East Meets West: The Uncanny Parallels in the Lives of Buddha and Jesus. Bible Review. 10/99. Pages 18ff. www.biblereview.org

A good article to compare Jesus and the Essene “Teacher of Righteousness” can be found in Bible Review, 2/94, Pages 42. www.biblereview.org This comparison can help to situate yourself in the times of the early church as they tried to choose between the options available for belief.

Stegemann, Hartmut. Jesus and the Teacher of Righteousness: Similarities and Differences.

In an early church document that dealt with what was proper for worship and ministry called the *Didascalia*, we find in chapter 10: “But you shall by no means hinder them to enter the church and to hear the word, O bishop. For even our Lord and Savior did not completely put away and cast out publicans and sinners, but did even eat with them. On this account the Pharisees murmured against him and said: “He eats with publicans and sinners. Then our Savior answered and said against their thoughts and their murmuring, and said: The whole ones have no need of a physician, but they that are sick.” Therefore, deal with those who have been convicted of sins and are sick, and associate them with yourselves, and take care of their fat, and speak to them and console them, and keep hold of them, and make them to return.

Ehrman, Bart. After the New Testament. NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 1998. Page 357.

In the mid 2nd Century text called Second Clement, we find in chapter 2:4-7; “And another Scripture says, “I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners. This means that those perishing must be saved. Yes, a great and wonderful thing it is to support, not things which are standing, but those which are collapsing. Thus it was that the Christ willed to save what was perishing: and he saved many when he came and called us who were actually perishing.”

Ehrman, Bart. After the New Testament. NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 1998. Page 364.
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0195114450/theark/>

No miracle in the gospel is offered as a “proof” of anything. Every miracle is a spoken promise and every miracle is a work of human compassion. Jesus says to the beneficiary of the miracle, “Your faith has made you well.” He never says, “I worked this miracle to reward your faith.” Likewise the gospel says, “He had compassion... .He took pity” and this does not say that when he “had compassion” or “took pity” that he called on a reserve source or divine power and worked the miracle, by rather is it always a clear affirmation that the miracles were the work of his human compassion and pity, and they are the promise that those who believe in the “Word made flesh” will by believing, become the word made flesh themselves and, by their pity and compassion, perform the same miracles and will perform even greater works. Real believers in the Word of God by their faith become the real living loving presence of God, doing the wondrous works of God by their immediate sacramental presence, not as remote link in a chain of causality.

Parr, Raymond. Process Person Presence. Chicago. Thomas More Press. 1990. Page 116.
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0883472635/theark/>

In the first place, we need only look at the Pharisees of the Gospels. They were the good people, the ones who observed the laws so as to give reverent obedience to God. Yet this often kept them from being open, self-sacrificing, loving to others. For example: Mt. 9:10-12: The Pharisees, according to Jewish law, would prohibit Jesus from eating with tax collectors and sinners. Yet these were the very people who most needed Jesus’ friendship and mother love, so they could be converted to God. The Pharisees followed the law, but people died in the process. Topel, L. John, S.J. The Way to Peace. NY. Orbis Books. 1979. Page 114.
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0883447045/theark/>

To follow the vocation does not mean happiness; but once it has been heard, there is no happiness for those who do not follow. C. S. Lewis

My most spectacular answers to prayers have come when I was so helpless, so out of control as to be able to do nothing at all for myself. Catherine Marshall

Life shrinks or expands according to one’s courage. Anais Nin

The path of prayer/love and the path of suffering seem to be the two Great Paths of transformation. Suffering seems to get our attention; love and prayer seem to get our heart and our passion." Richard Rohr

In a book called **Acts of Pilate** that attempts to put Pilate in a good light, we find people coming forward at Jesus’ trial to testify on his behalf:

Chapter 6. And when Nicodemus had thus spoken, another Hebrew rose up, and said to Pilate: I beg of thee, my lord Pilate, hear me also. Pilate answered: Say what thou wishest. The Hebrew says: I lay sick in bed thirty-eight years; and when he saw me he was grieved, and said to me, Rise, take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And while he was saying the word to me, I rose and walked about. The Hebrews say: Ask him on what day of the week this happened. He says: On Sabbath.⁸The Jews said: And consequently we say truly, that he does not keep the Sabbath. Another, again, standing in the midst, said: I was born blind; and as Jesus was going along the road, I cried to him, saying, Have mercy upon me, Lord, thou son of David. And he took clay, and anointed mine eyes; and straight way I received my sight. Another said: I was crooked; and seeing him, I cried, Have mercy upon me, O Lord. And he took me by the hand, and I was immediately raised. Another said: I was a leper, and he healed me merely by a word.

Chapter 7. There was found there also a woman named Veronica, and she said: Twelve years I was in an issue of blood, and I only touched the edge of his garment, and directly I was cured. The Jews say: Our law does not admit the testimony of a woman. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/gospelnicodemus-roberts.html>

Information on this book: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01111b.htm>