

SERMON: CALLED TO FOLLOW

Our scripture today covers several stories. We hear the story of Matthew's call combined with two accounts of healing—a woman healed of a bleeding disorder and a young girl whose life is restored. It invites us to think about not only Jesus' ministry on earth, but the nature of the church's ministry in our contemporary world.

This passage begins with Jesus calling Matthew for whom this gospel is named. Matthew was "sitting and collecting" tax revenues at the time, which was his occupation. He was a tax collector. It was rather characteristic of Jesus to call his disciples while they were in the middle of doing something else. And Matthew stops what he is doing and follows Jesus and becomes a disciple.

Now, tax collectors were not popular and rather despised in the culture of the time. We might think of Matthew as a person who would be least likely to be called a disciple of Jesus. Yet Jesus reaches out to Matthew and says, "Follow me." Then Jesus goes with Matthew to his home and has dinner with him and other tax collectors and sinners, the text tells us. He offers his companionship and never criticizes them or demands their repentance.

This met with the disapproval of the Pharisees/as much of Jesus' ministry had been doing./ But Jesus response is "I desire mercy, not sacrifice./ For I have come to call not the righteous/but sinners."

We can see that it is Jesus who initiates the call to Matthew./for it is not Matthew who chooses Jesus/but rather Jesus who chooses Matthew./ "Follow me" said Jesus./ The verb "follow" is in the imperative mood./so it is like a command./

There was no chance for Matthew to say,/"Well, let me give this some thought./ It's a big ask/and I am going to need some time/to think things over./ I have a lot going on right now."/ No, that's not what Matthew said./Matthew says nothing./ Instead, the text tells us/"he got up and followed" Jesus./

Earlier in Matthew's gospel (4:18-20)/Jesus is walking by the Sea of Galilee/ and he sees Peter and Andrew/while they were "casting a net into the sea."/ Jesus then calls them to be his disciples./ Soon after something similar happens./ He sees James and John with their father mending their fishing nets, (4:21-22)/ and he calls them as well./ Once again, it is Jesus who initiates the call./

The second part of this passage is quite different./ Here we enter the story of a woman with a hemorrhage,/ and a leader of the synagogue/with a young daughter who has just died./ Both the woman and the leader/take the initiative to reach out to Jesus/ and call on him for healing/ and Jesus follows them./ It differs from Jesus



calling Matthew, for it is Jesus who initiates the call and Matthew who **follows**.
Either way it is a call.

And Jesus calls us still. He calls us to ministry like he called Matthew. And the needs of those in the community and in the world around us call us to ministry as well.

We could be called while we are taking a call on our cell phone or getting into our car to drive to work, or going to a doctor's appointment. Often that still, small voice comes to us when we are in the middle of doing something quite ordinary. Yet what we may be called to do, could be something rather extraordinary.

Cleophas La Rue ~~has said,~~
A seminary professor & writer has said:
"You can never get to the next thing that God has for you until, in an act of simple obedience, you let go of where you are and follow after him."

Will we answer the call and follow? Will we say no? Or will we say, "Here I am Lord. Send Me."

Sir Francis Drake, a 16th Century explorer, wrote the follow prayer, which I will end our sermon with:

Disturb us, O Lord when we are too pleased with ourselves,

When our dreams come true/because we dreamed too little/

When we have arrived in safety/because we have sailed/too close to the shore. /

Disturb us, O Lord,/when with the abundance of the things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; //

When having fallen in love with time/we have ceased to dream of eternity;/

And in our efforts to build the new earth/we have allowed our vision of the new heaven/to grow dim./

Stir us, O Lord,/to dare more boldly,/to venture on wider seas/where storms shall show Thy mastery/and, where losing sight of the land/we shall find the stars. /

In the name of Him/who pushed back the horizons of our hopes/and invited the brave to follow,/even the name of Christ Jesus, our Lord. //

Gracious God, Help us to see you more clearly/follow you more nearly,/and love you more dearly/day by day, we pray. /

