

Discipleship in the Lectionary - 06/11/2023



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Revised Common Lectionary Year A

Sunday, June 11th

Matthew 9:9-13; (18-26)

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The Call of Matthew

Following on from the Great Commission text from last week's Gospel lection, this week's text includes the call of Matthew which will be the focus of this commentary. What does Matthew's call teach us about responding to Christ's call on our life? What insights are there in this Scripture to guide the church in relating to the world in a culture that is post-Christian?

Matthew 9:9-13 Commentary

As context for this Scripture, in Chapters 5-7 Jesus demonstrated his Messiahship by his teaching. In Chapter 8-9:38, Jesus shows He is the Messiah by His actions – the many miracles and healings. This text is embedded in the latter section. Before this text Jesus explains the cost of being a disciple. After this text, Jesus uses the parables of the new cloth on old garments and new wine in old wineskins to show the incompatibility of the teachings of the Pharisees with the teachings of Jesus. It is also important to recognize these events take place in Capernaum, the center of Jesus' Galilean ministry - "*And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city.*" Capernaum is named in Mark's account.

⁹As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

Jesus encountered Matthew as he walked along in Capernaum. Jesus did not wait for Matthew to come to Him. Matthew encounters Jesus when he was at work. As Jesus extends the call, Matthew accepts – *he rose and followed*. It is possible this was not the first meeting between Jesus and Matthew since they were both had connections with Capernaum. The call to discipleship may be a process rather than an event (see the example of Nicodemus) yet at some point a call is extended and there are only two responses possible – yes or no.

¹⁰And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

In Luke's account it specifically states the house belonged to Matthew/Levi (Luke 5:29). Matthew must have thus been the one to invite the guests. The term "Matthew Party" is now a recognized and popular means of inviting non-believers to meet believers in a relaxed social setting outside of church.

¹¹And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

The self-righteous Pharisees complain that Jesus is eating with sinners. They defined sinners as anyone who failed to keep God's law as they interpreted it. Tax collectors were cooperating with the occupying Romans and were well known for demanding a greater payment of tax than necessary to line their own pockets. Tax collectors were considered unclean. The orthodox, those who kept every detail of the Law, were forbidden to mix with those who did not. Jesus is doing what no pious person would have done. Notice how they did not challenge Jesus directly but complained to His disciples.

¹² *But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*

Jesus responds with an old Jewish proverb from a commentary of Exodus 15:26. Jesus is using disease as a metaphor for sin. As a metaphor, sin destroys our healthy relationship with God just as disease destroys our body. Jesus is simply saying He is going where the need is greatest. Interestingly, only those who knew they were sinners would accept the invitation. Those who were pious and thought themselves righteous in the eyes of the Law, in other words, self-righteous, would never have accepted.

¹³ *Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."*

Jesus now quotes from Hosea 6:6. The Pharisees focused more on preservation of their own holiness rather than helping those outside the Law. They only criticized and condemned the shortcomings of others. Where a doctor confronts a disease with a desire to help, the Pharisees only turn away in disgust. They practiced only outward orthodoxy (sacrifice), yet God desires us to extend mercy, to love our neighbors, to love God with all our being, not just practice transactional rituals.

Reflections

Jesus' new wine of grace and mercy could not be contained in the old wineskins of the legalistic tradition of the Jewish establishment. They eventually had Him killed. Due to human failings, the same Pharisaic disease found its way into the human expression of church. Numerous times throughout the history of the church, the establishment resisted Reformation and the working of the Holy Spirit in great awakenings and revivals. In the post-Christian era, to what extent is the declining established expression of church the old wineskin? While Jesus' teaching and the Great Ends of the Church remain constant, the expression of church has demonstrated much change over the last two millennia. What is the expression of church needed for our time and place? What is the new wine?

The call of Matthew demonstrates some unchanging fundamentals of discipleship. Jesus called Matthew. Jesus met Matthew where he was. Matthew accepted the call and invited others to encounter Christ.

Application

- In the text, which character or group of characters do you most identify with:
 - The disciples quietly following Jesus in the background?
 - Matthew as a newly called disciple in the process of having his life transformed?
 - The tax collectors and sinners suddenly given a seat at the table?
 - The Pharisees seeing their tradition and doctrine being challenged?
 - Jesus in His relentless pursuit of the lost?
- Which part of the human expression of church do you represent? The old wineskin or the new wine?