

MEDITATION 18

Mark 2: 13-15

- ¹³ Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. ¹⁴ As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax-collection station, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him.
- ¹⁵ And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

"Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them."

Jesus needs an open space where many can gather. A crowd gathers around him, and he "teaches them". What is this teaching about? We have already encountered this in earlier meditations. Is it about love and what love can mean in a world of hate, violence, mistrust and hurt? How may healing and empowerment for love and through love be opened up for people? How may it be opened up further for you?...

"As Jesus was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax-collection station, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him."

OK, how does Jesus demonstrate love in action here?... He has already called Peter and Andrew, James and John (Mark 1:16-18). But with Levi it is more complicated. Levi practices a profession which abuses his own people for profit. As a tax collector he profits from collecting taxes on behalf of Rome. Should Jesus not call him to repent and stop this practice before he even imagines calling him to serve as a disciple?...

But then, Jesus has called you and me too. Are we that pure of sin ourselves? Maybe we don't make our money from taking advantage or abusing other people. But are we called because we are morally worthy?... Or are we made worthy because we are called?... Think about that...

Prayer: I come before you, O God, sometimes feeling less than worthy... But other times, O God, I feel more worthy than others I see around me... But is this worthy of my relationship with you?... Is it not you who have made my worth infinite by your love beyond anything I may or may not deserve? Do we not all come before you needing a worth we can never earn ourselves?... Do we not all need a love beyond any calculus of merit?... How hard it is to learn this and internalize this, O God... Teach us... Amen.

"And as he sat at dinner in Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him."

Why are all these tax collectors following Jesus? How has Jesus drawn in people who are not only disreputable, but have hardened their consciences to make money the way they do? And yet, what has Jesus been teaching? Love.

Love has many dimensions to it as we will be learning from Jesus too.

- There is the call to change (repentance) which empowers people when they know they are loved before they even take the first step.
- There is love that leads to healing not only in the body, but in the mind and spirit too.
- And there is fellowship. Jesus does not put walls around who he will associate with and who he will not. He makes no judgement with his love, but allows his love to inspire people to make their own self-judgements and change accordingly. Levi (whom tradition later will recognize as Matthew) will leave aside his profession and follow Jesus. What other changes will happen in Levi's life?

What changes have happened in your life when you felt called by Jesus in some way at work, in a relationship, through an ordeal, or at this time of your life? Is Jesus calling you now in some specific way and in some specific relationship? Or have you not heard the call?...

PRAYER: We come, O God, not because we are worthy in ourselves and by ourselves, but because you have made us worthy. You have filled our hearts with a conviction of our infinite worth. But do we trust such a conviction? Do we believe it with a humility that recognizes it is a gift given out of love rather than merit?

Thank you for calling us. Thank you for teaching us your love. Thank you for challenging us to break down walls around us that are not about safety from harm, but safety from the challenge of loving deeper, wider, more inclusively and attentively...

Help us create bridges beyond the impasses within our hearts when it comes to love. Help us break out of the prisons of our own making. Keep calling us and calling to us... We will practice our listening and grow in it... In Jesus' name, Amen.