

MEDITATION 19

Mark 2: 16-17

¹⁶ When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹⁷ When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

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We have already addressed who tax collectors were in our previous meditation. In collaboration with Rome, tax collectors made money by extorting their own people. How far would you go to make money? Would you take advantage of someone or would you spin what you were doing so that it didn't seem all that bad?... Have you ever done that? Have you justified or rationalized something you did for yourself or your advantage that was not necessarily good for someone else?...

What do we refuse to see because it's uncomfortable and would require action or change if we did see?...

And who were sinners? They could be any number of people who were labelled socially not conforming or not living by the rules of good and decent living. They could also be people who may have done something bad in the past or belonged to the wrong group or family, and thus, had to carry the shame and the association forever after... Have you ever made a mistake or done something you've regretted, but also something that has stuck to you or you carry still in your conscience with some shame?...

We need mercy in our lives and we need mercy for others... How do we separate the bad from the good but also welcome space for grace, mercy, second chances and new beginnings?...

Prayer: Thank you, O God, for your mercy to me... Show me where I need it... Show me how much of it I need... Help me release what I cannot let go with another person... Help me find acceptance and peace for myself... May I find enough mercy for another person as I would need it for myself... And may I never presume not to need mercy in my life because I convince myself I could never be that bad... Humble me in knowing my limitations, my vulnerability and my fragility in any moral goodness I claim for myself... May I find peace in the truth and assurance in your mercy... Amen.

17 When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

OK, Jesus makes it seem as if he is only interested in calling those who are "sick" and need a physician for the soul as much as for the body or mind... In order to be called by Jesus, then, do we have to think of ourselves as "sick?"

Jesus is speaking to two kinds of people. Those who are sick and know they need healing are one group. They respond more ready to Jesus and are ready for change and growth. Another group feel frustrated, resentful and full of judgements on others whom they see as fallen and guilty in some ways for their own troubles. Whether there is any truth to this or not, the healing Jesus calls them to is mercy... But why should they have mercy for others? Because they need mercy themselves. They need mercy for hardening their hearts. They need the healing of love to flood their souls. They need the grace of recognizing how much they're being "good" people is supported by an environment and world that has formed them even as they are vulnerable to failing love with the hardening of their hearts.

So where are you in this interaction? Do you readily identify with sinners? What about the Scribes and Pharisees? Most of us are somewhere in between. But where may some hardening of our hearts have happened? Where may we need to appreciate our need for a greater mercy? We claim the language of grace, but do we really believe it? Do we really believe we can never be worthy or deserving of the love with which God has to shower us, and must accept it as an unmerited gift?

PRAYER: We come, O God, in our need. We come because we are, yes, sinners, in need of mercy and grace. We come, O God, because the sickness we often suffer is not necessarily physical or even mental. It is a failure of love in our soul. It is a hardening in our hearts.

Come to us, O God... Help us see more clearly into ourselves... Soften our hearts towards others in their fallen yet beautiful humanity outside the shell of their brokenness...

We need mercy, O God... In our failures and mistakes as much as in our hardness of heart in our judgements and contempt for others in their failures and mistakes... For all the shine, the smiles and the attractiveness of our exterior, O God, you see us in the darkness also... We fight with self-doubt if we are honest... We struggle with our need to be loved, admired and recognized, and we feel wounded when we don't receive what we think we deserve...

Help us find our peace in your acceptance and love... Help us love people as they are, not just as we hope and expect they should be... And help us accept your love of us as we are, not as we imagine ourselves to be...

May such love empower us to rise up more free to love past the failures and the inadequacies in others as much as in ourselves... In Jesus' name; Amen.