

“SHIFTING PRIORITIES”

Luke 5: 27-32

January 28, 1028

Holiday Island Presbyterian Church

²⁷ After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” ²⁸ And he got up, left everything, and followed him.

²⁹ Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. ³⁰ The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” ³¹ Jesus answered, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; ³² I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

INTRODUCTION:

**The time of our scripture today is
shortly after Jesus called Simon and Andrew,
James and John from their fishing business
to follow Him and become His disciples.**

It is still early in Jesus’ ministry in Galilee.

**As Jesus and His few disciples are roaming from town to town
and as He is begging to preach the Good News of the Gospel
He comes across a tax collector named Levi – Matthew.**

**There is a slight misunderstanding about whether Levi – Matthew –
was a “tax” collector or a “toll” collector.**

**Tax collectors were employees of the Roman government,
charged with the task of collecting taxes for Rome.**

**Toll collectors, on the other hand, were independent.
They actually paid in advance for the right to collect tolls,
tariffs and custom fees.**

**Levi would have applied for a permit to collect fees,
he would have paid his fees
and whatever he then collected would be his to keep.**

**Quite often these collectors were not from the area
in which they worked
which would give rise to suspicion and distrust.**

**Adding to that distrust is the fact
that the whole system was subject to corruption and graft.**

**Sort of like the postal service in Botswana
When I was there in Peace Corps.**

**I quickly learned which postal worker charged the least for stamps.
One would charge nearly double the going rate,
One would charge whatever he felt like that day
And one was honest.**

**I tried to get the honest one when I needed stamps,
but often just settled for paying double.
I avoided the one who charged whatever he felt like.**

**That must be why tax collectors were not trusted.
I'm pretty sure the rates were occasionally inflated.**

MATTHEW:

**When Jesus saw Matthew,
He didn't just see a tax collector.
He saw the spiritual potential within Matthew.**

**Jesus saw what Matthew could become
if he would listen to and obey God.**

It is exactly the same for each of us.

**Sometimes we are called to do something in the church,
some office or function for which we don't feel qualified.**

**Remember what I said last week:
God doesn't necessarily call the qualified;
God equips those who are called.**

**The call of Matthew is an example of a call from God
that is sheer grace.**

**Matthew had absolutely nothing to commend him.
No qualifications, no virtue, no reputation.
He was simply one chosen by God
to be equipped to serve as a disciple.**

**Think about this for a moment
and let it dawn on you as it did for the disciples.**

**If Jesus could call a tax collector, a *tax collector*
then Jesus could call *anyone*.**

**When I was called to be a preacher,
there was absolutely no way I was prepared for that!**

**I saw myself as a business administrator in a large church.
I never expected to stand behind a pulpit!
I responded to that call fully expecting to fail.
By the sheer grace of God, I did not.**

MATTHEW'S RESPONSE:

Matthew responds in two ways –

both of which signal a major shift in his priorities.

**First, like the fishermen,²⁸ . . . he got up, left everything,
and followed Jesus.**

**Personally, I hope he took his cash box with him,
and his receipts –
he'll need those for his tax return.**

**Here we have another perfect example
of the transforming power of God.**

**One minute, Matthew is collecting taxes as usual –
the next moment, he is called by Jesus
and he leaves everything behind to follow the call.**

**The second response is that arranged
to host a great feast in Jesus' honor.**

**One of the things I adore about Luke
is his ability to write like a gentle novelist.**

**In Luke's dramatic fashion,
he quickly moves the scene from a tax collector's booth
to a banquet.**

**He doesn't give us time to question Matthew's call;
he doesn't ask us to consider the implications,
he just boldly shifts the scene . . .
. . . shifts the priority, if you will.**

Such feasts in the Galilee were almost always public affairs.

**Therefore, there would have been a gathering of all sorts of people.
People the Pharisees and scribes refer to
as “tax collectors and sinners.”
Ritually unclean and undesirable.**

A word about the scribes and Pharisees.

**Scribes were trained in the law – both religious and civil –
and they made no distinction between the two.**

**These scribes and Pharisees
showed their devotion to God
through study and observance of the Torah
and maintaining purity in all matters.**

**Since part of their study and practice
included very strict laws about food and eating,
there would be a wide religious gap
between those who simply ate food
and those who observed the food laws.**

**The Pharisees would maintain a separation between themselves
and those who were impure in their eating habits.**

**For them to see a prophet – healer – teacher
eating with such riff raff would be scandalous.**

**How could this possibly be someone of any importance
if he is being honored by outcasts?
And sharing the table with unclean sinners?**

**And yet, that is the hallmark of Jesus.
Everyone is invited to His table.
No one is excluded.**

That is beyond the tradition and comprehension of the Pharisees.

**Another huge problem for the scribes and Pharisees is
that Jesus is eating with these folks
before calling them to repentance!**

**Jesus is demonstrating God's grace
and acceptance of sinners before they repent!**

**Jesus' actions clearly demonstrate
that to be called as a disciple
is not to separate from the sinners and the worldly,
but to embrace and include
the sinners and the worldly.**

**Do you see how this stands in direct opposition
to what the Pharisees and scribes were teaching?**

**Jesus was shifting the priorities that were in place
from putting the emphasis on the law
to putting people first.**

**It is a new style of discipleship
that is based upon including sinners
rather than excluding them.**

**Whereas the scribes and Pharisees
would have picked from the righteous and the clean
to be their disciples,
Jesus does the opposite.**

**Jesus picks ordinary people
and relies on the sheer grace of God
to transform them into fully functioning disciples.**

Steal a look around you.

Not one of us in this room would qualify to be a Pharisee.

**But by the loving grace of God,
we have all been called to be disciples.**

Are we all at the same spiritual level?

No.

**But each of us is on a spiritual journey
to become what God calls us to be.**

Where we were spiritually is no longer relevant to anything.

**Where we are now in our spiritual journey
is not nearly as important
as where we are heading.**

That is what Jesus was modeling at that feast!

That is the recruiting tool behind his call to the disciples!

Of course, the Pharisees did not understand a bit of this.

That is why

³⁰ “The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

To which Jesus replied:

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; ³² I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

In other words,

**Jesus is asking: What good is a physician
that only treats healthy people?**

**The ones who need a physician
are those who are sick.**

**Too often, because of television and movies –
or perhaps even personal experience –
we think of calling people to repentance
as shaming them into repenting.**

**There's the ubiquitous bearded prophet
with the sign that says:
"Repent! The end is near."**

**Or the fiery tent-revival preacher
who tries to win people to Christ
by threatening people with eternal hell fire.**

**This week and last week,
we've seen how Jesus calls people into discipleship.**

**Jesus' call to discipleship is absolute,
unconditional and above all it is people-centered.**

**When Jesus says that He has
"come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance"
it is this exact same call.**

It is an invitation.

**It is an invitation to shift one's priorities.
To leave behind the burdensome past
and to walk with Jesus into a bright future.**

**If you have not already heard that call,
then listen closely . . .
. . . you may hear it today.**

If not today, perhaps very soon.

**If you heard that call
and have shifted your priorities away from Jesus
hear this as a call to come “home.”**

**Listen for that call.
It’s an invitation to a banquet you don’t want to miss.**