

11 June 2023 Ps 50:7-15, Matthew 9:9-13 and 18-26

We have three very different stories here and four main characters. Jesus (our hero!) Matthew the tax collector, a sick woman and an official from the synagogue. What is our hero going to do for each of them? What do they have to do for him? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, what is the relevance of the reading from the Psalms?

Remember the wedding at Cana? The wine ran out and Mary asked Jesus to **do** something! And he told her that it wasn't time yet, (but he still helped out, what a sweetie!)

He wasn't ready then. Did his loving father want him to build strength and maturity and get a bit of lived experience under his belt? He certainly had some challenges ahead. However, by the time we get to these stories in Matthew's gospel, he's in his prime. He's in his first year of ministry and he's flexing his muscles. He has driven out devils, forgiven a paralysed man and told him to walk home. He has calmed a storm on the sea of Galilee, and he is busy building his team. He has already recruited Peter, James and John. People want to hear what he has to say, and they want to see more miracles. Crowds flock to him wherever he goes. This is a man who speaks and acts with the power and authority of God.

In the first part of our gospel reading, he spots Matthew, the tax collector.

Who is this man, Matthew? No doubt an outcast from Jewish society. He's seen as a collaborator, and he's making money out of it, a cheat, dishonouring his religion and his heritage.

I wonder what sort of man he is. Ambitious, eager to get ahead and make money and a comfortable life for himself, unconcerned about upsetting friends and family along the way? He has achieved that goal. Now he has the life he wanted, does he still have that longing for something more? Perhaps he has prayed for a new beginning, a refresh button for his life. Does he doubt that he can be any use to God, after the life he has lived?

Jesus walks past his office and fixes him with his gimlet gaze. This is it! No doubts, no turning back. Matthew gets up and leaves everything. He walks away, into his new life.

They have dinner together (at Matthew's house, perhaps) with guests who are **not** accepted in polite society: the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the sinners. No wonder the Pharisees, the Holy Law keepers, are shocked!

Next we hear about a leader in the synagogue. He's well known, used to being in charge, making decisions, organising his life and managing people around him. Don't we know people like that?

However, disaster strikes. His little daughter is seriously ill and he is stunned. How many times have we thought that we've got life sorted when something terrible happens and we realise that we're powerless? Helpless, he throws himself at Jesus' feet and implores him to come and save her. This time it's Jesus who doesn't hesitate.

Timidly a woman approaches, sure that by just touching Jesus' clothes, she will be healed. Not only is she healed but recognised, encouraged and cherished by Jesus. Yet this woman was an outcast because of her condition, probably rejected by her family and definitely unable to worship in the synagogue. She may even have been considered sinful, her malady being a divine punishment. It's so easy to judge people who don't fit in; so easy to feel rejected by that judgement.

Jesus is defiled by her touch, but he knows her and her faith: she is healed.

He goes on to that poor father's house, where the mourning party is already in full swing. 'She's only sleeping' he declares, and the flute players and mourners laugh at him. Offered a grain of hope, they choose to laugh, like good seed falling on the path. They are too attached to their way of doing things to open their eyes and see.

Quietly, Jesus revives the child by taking her hand. Astounding! According to the Pharisees, Jesus is defiled by touching a dead body. And yet again, he doesn't hesitate.

Let's return to the psalm. We don't need to make animal sacrifices, it says, all creation belongs to God anyway. We should be grateful for the gifts of God, we should keep our

promises to him, made in the commandments, we should be obedient, we should be humble, we must ask God for help when we need it. That's the message of the psalmist.

The Pharisees and the funeral attendants are focused on following the laws and customs. They miss the point completely.

Consider the main characters again. Jesus, son of God, has both the authority and the power and he is brimming over with the love of God. Matthew, obedience personified. The desperate father begs Jesus to follow him and help, a woman silently appeals for help. All three are completely focused on the first commandment, the promise to love God. All concerned, tax collector and sick woman, outsiders, and a man in a position of influence, but feeling desperately worried, have humbly demonstrated unwavering faith. Moreover, they have acted upon it. Their reward? A new life, walking with Jesus, wholeness and salvation.

Now there's a fantastic prize!

Now I'm wondering. Do any of the main characters resonate with you? Matthew - was that you...is that you? The anxious father, the desperate woman? Or perhaps characters I haven't focused on, the sick girl, the disciples watching all this unfold. Scripture tells us what happened but invites us to identify with the story or to bring our own story to the main character...to Jesus. I called him a hero. I also said he was a sweetie!! I said he was fully into his ministry during these events. He was then. He is now. Don't hesitate...come to him with your story. What's more, is there, in the blue corner, waiting to pray with you, if that would help.

Fleur Pelly, 11 June 2023