

A Controversial Call?

The Gospel lesson (Matthew 9: 9-13) for this Sunday, June 11th, the Second Sunday after Pentecost, tells of Jesus' calling of Matthew, one of the 12 disciples. Jesus calls Matthew to follow him. As it turns out, he accepts hospitality in Matthew's house. There he shares a table with Matthew's typical crowd, toll & tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees perceive "toll collectors and sinners" as natural companions (9:11), and Jesus himself compares them not to those who are well but to those who are sick (9:12). Jesus says the healthy do not need a physician while the sick do, that he has come to call not the righteous but sinners (9:13). Jesus has many harsh words to say in the Gospel of Matthew, but he directs none of them at sinners. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus not once reproves sinners. He does not criticize them. He does not demand their repentance. He simply eats and drinks with them.

So, Jesus calls this man of unacceptable status and Matthew gets up and follows after him. Implied in Matthew's following of Jesus is the leaving of his desk, the symbol of his profession and the root of his sinfulness.⁴ God never calls us **to** something, without first calling us **away from** something. Some people will never fully come into discipleship because they find themselves unable to let go of commitments in which they are oftentimes legitimately engaged before the call of God comes into their lives. In Genesis, God calls Abraham to "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). To answer the call, Abraham must leave his past behind and trust God for his future. But before Abraham can get to that place yet to be named by God, he must let go of where he is and march forward into God's promised future. You can never get to the next thing that God has for you until, in an act of simple obedience, you let go of where you are and follow after him.

Jesus calling a tax-collector to become a disciple may seem to us a controversial call. Tax-collectors were despised for they were often believed to cheat the people whose taxes they were instructed to collect. They were considered to be no better than swindlers and murderers; they were believed to be guilty of flagrant moral offenses. It is likely that Matthew was indeed a customs (toll/tax) official, counted among those of such ill repute. Yet Jesus extends the call to him. **It is not so much what Jesus sees in us that makes us worthy, but rather what he puts in us when we obey his command, "Follow me"**. It is up to us to say, "Yes, I will," or "no, I won't"!

Come and worship this Sunday and hear Jesus' call, "Follow Me".