

Sunday February 18th, 2024

“Bad Company”

Scripture: Luke 5:27-32



For the next 4 weeks our sermons will focus on sitting with Jesus at the dinner table, to see who He is, what decisions He makes, His bravery and His compassion for those who “don’t fit in.”

Today’s sermon focuses on a hated tax collector Levi, known later as Matthew. He chose to leave everything he had to follow Jesus.

Q. What emergency would it take for you to leave everything behind?

Would there be any items you wished to take? Like me, a Bible, a Novel, Soft toy, Picture of Jesus.

What about a tax collector – he may have had a clipboard, calculator, stapler, and pen. Perhaps not in the Ancient Near East but certainly today. And Levi left all his possessions behind?

We make choices every day about who to follow, who to be with, who to listen to and who to imitate.

Think about how you make those kind of decisions as we continue exploring this dinner party with Jesus, Levi and other “sinners.”

Mealtimes were far more than an occasion to eat in the Ancient Near East. It was a ceremony, symbolic of friendship, intimacy, and unity. Communal meals provided an important social and religious venue for defining and experiencing fellowship. Not unlike our Café Revive, morning tea and free breakfast.

We read in Psalm 1:1 “blessed is the man who does not walk or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.”

Proverbs 13:20 “He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.”

This reveals a Biblical injunction and Jewish tradition as a warning against improper or intimate association with the wicked, especially at mealtimes.

Have you ever considered hosting a meal with friends you haven't seen for a while? But you struggle with the guest list because this person does not like that person; this person tends to look down on this other person and on it goes.

Levi did not worry about that. The Bible does not say that the Pharisees were invited but does say that they knew about it and complained to Jesus' disciples, saying what is He doing eating and drinking with misfits and sinners.

The Pharisees were not against the party but against the guest list of tax collectors, social outcasts, and other dubious characters. Meals represented “boundary markers” – between different levels of intimacy and acceptance. But it also opened the way to reconciliation.

Levi left a lucrative, though dishonest tax collecting business to follow Jesus. Then, as was the cultural custom, he held a banquet for his fellow tax-collectors and other sinners, so they could meet Jesus too.

His decision could have backfired, especially if they knew nothing much about Jesus, or knew Him as a Rabbi and were not

interested in God. But Levi knew he was a sinner, lost and hopeless and like any friend, wanted to share this good news with them.

What would Jesus need to be like for you to invite Him to a banquet and call your friends over too?

What and who we value leads quickly to the decisions we make.

Think about how you choose to fill your spare time, which people you choose to be around and who you wish you could see more often.

These decisions reveal what you value, what you love, who you trust and how you choose your friends.

The Pharisees made themselves appear good by publicly doing good deeds and pointing out the sins of others.

Can you identify any times that you may have done that?

You may judge that a person is sinning because of the clothes they wear; or how they are acting; or pointing out they may be greedy or selfish or prideful etc.

I believe we are all guilty of doing that and that links us to the Pharisees.

Jesus chose not to spend time with the self-righteous and religious leaders but with people who sensed their own sin and knew that they were not good enough for God.

As Jesus said: “who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? I’m here inviting outsiders, not insiders – an invitation to a changed life, changed inside and out.

For us to come to God, we must acknowledge our sin, renounce our sin, and repent of our sin.

Almighty God, help us to understand what is most precious to us – our money, our material possessions, our friends – all are important, but we need to realise that we were born into this world with nothing, and we will leave this world with nothing.

Help us to acknowledge how precious Jesus is to us, how loving, compassionate He is, and how He freely chose to save us from our sins and give us an eternity of living with Him, that we can leave this world with nothing because we have been given everything through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.