

Seeing is believing



I recently 'zoomed in' on the Western Region Virtual Clergy Muster.

As we renewed our ordination vows, we reflected on the call of Matthew described in [Matthew 9.9-13](#).

It's very brief, only the skeleton of the narrative really. In very few words we learn that Jesus saw Matthew, that Matthew was a tax collector, that Jesus called him saying "Follow me" and that Matthew got up and followed.

We're left to read between the lines a bit to fill in the gaps.

Evidently Jesus' call exerted considerable influence on Matthew. There seems to have been power in it because he got up and followed. It's reminiscent of the earlier calls to fishermen in [chapter 4.18-22](#) who immediately leave their nets and follow Jesus. Matthew does the same thing here.

Notice the range of people Jesus calls. He calls not only relatively common people like fishermen. Here he calls a deeply despised person, a tax collector. Tax collectors were hated because they worked for the Roman authorities, in other words a foreign, occupying power. And their job was to extract money from the locals to give to that foreign power. That was bad enough, but the tax collectors extracted more than the Romans demanded and lined their own pockets with the extra. So the tax collectors were hated and ostracised as a result.

And this hated, ostracised, despised sinner Jesus calls.

The text says that "As Jesus was walking along, he **saw**...Matthew..."

Jesus **saw** him. Have you ever noticed how often in the gospels 'seeing' is such a key thing? Seeing is often associated with coming to faith or expressing faith. The healing of people who were blind often parallels with the disciples finally understanding Jesus, faith finally dawning for them.

And notice what happens in this passage. Jesus **sees** Matthew, but not as others had seen him. The Pharisees, and probably Jesus' disciples too, saw Matthew as a despicable, miserable traitor of Israel to be spurned and shunned.

Not so Jesus. Jesus seems to see beneath his evident unattractiveness, his ambiguity, his vulnerability. Jesus seems to see him as a beloved child of God, who can be healed, restored, transformed, re-created. So Jesus says 'Come'. No one had said that to Matthew for a very long time. 'Come.'

In that single word 'come' Jesus is asking Matthew to be with him, to enter into relationship with him, to join a community with Jesus and his other companions.

It must have blown Matthew's mind to be seen like that and spoken to like that. To have been on the receiving end of nothing but hate, derision, repulsion and then feel that divine love and acceptance had come to rest on

him – on him of all people – must have been a profound shock. The embodiment of divine love says to him ‘Come’.

And the text records simply that “He got up and followed.”

Instantly he’s at dinner with Jesus and his disciples: sharing a meal, engaged in conversation, building trust, being renewed as never before, breaking down old barriers and divisions, discovering community, communion.

Matthew’s personal transformation, and the transformation of this ragtag community, stems from the mysterious power of genuine communion. It’s nothing less than the dawning of the actual reign of God through Jesus’ word and action.

Everyone around the table is empowered by being ‘seen’ as children of God, by being embraced by God’s transforming acceptance and love. Having been ‘seen’ in this way, they come to believe and follow.

Clergy are ordained to spread this good news, to implement this new community, to join in God’s transformation of the world. And lay people, the whole *laos* of God, are caught up in the same project.

Sunday Devotions • Friday 2 October 2020 • By Dr Robin Ray

Sunday Devotion: 11 October 2020, Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Hats on! Follow Paul’s advice

Main Readings: [Exodus 32.1-14](#); [Psalm 106.1-6, 20-24](#); [Philippians 4](#) or [4.1-9](#); [Matthew 22.1-14](#) [[Isaiah 25.1-9](#); [Psalm 23](#)]

Supplementary Readings: [Psalm 85](#); [Matthew 20.29-34](#); [Exodus 32.15-20, 33.7-11a](#); [Psalm 23](#); [Romans 16.17-27](#)

“...whatever is true...honourable...just...pure...pleasing... commendable...think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned” ([Philippians 4.8-9](#))

After the school bus stopped for the rail crossing outside our regional town, my fellow school students and I would don our mandatory school hats and gloves instead of when we departed the train, as was required. Each day began with a school assembly complete with hymns, the whole school reading together from our JB Phillips Bibles and prayers. On specific occasions we read our school Bible passage Philippians 4.8-9. Hearing these words gave me some assurance about what is important and how I should live, but also raised some teenage guilt especially where school hats and gloves were concerned!

Paul provides advice about the virtues that should be foremost in the minds of Christians. In our world today, truth can be difficult to determine especially when we listen to media reports that include references to so-called ‘fake news’. Our Christian faith gives us some guidance about truth, but what other resources do you draw upon to ensure truth in your life?

Acts that are honourable and commendable are often linked with purity of thought. Such virtues may be at work in the community through care and relief organisations, as well as people who show respect for all. What examples of justice do you experience in your interactions with others in the family, community and on the global level?

Paul’s words encourage us to reflect, learn and lead a life where thoughts and actions that are not self-centred, but God- and other-centred.