

Text: Matthew 9:1-13 (NIV)

Sunday 9th August 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's Word.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Last week we were introduced to that statement from the Church Without Walls Report, which said that the core purpose of the church is 'to invite, encourage and enable people to be disciples of Jesus Christ.' We focused especially on the words 'invite' and 'disciples', so today I want to focus more on 'encourage', because in this life of faith, in this calling to be disciples who invite others to be disciples, we need encouragement.

Boys and girls, have you ever done something that's hard? Maybe you had to try something new? Well, whatever that hard thing was, what helped you keep going? To keep trying? I'll give you 60 seconds to think or talk about that at home. (PAUSE)

If you like, put up in the Live Chat the ideas you came up with. Maybe you said, people who were around you, like friends or family; it might have been the words that they used; or maybe it was a sense of accomplishment that helped you to keep going.

One of my hobbies is rock climbing, and when I was starting out in rock climbing, it was really hard. My arms would get sore, I'd fall off the wall, I'd get frustrated that I couldn't get to the top of a climb...

But what kept me going were my friends, because their encouragement, their words, their own perseverance, helped me find strength, of body and of heart, of will.

The word “encouragement” literally means “to give heart” – to give strength to your heart to keep going, to persevere – and we all need that, most days, most weeks; we need someone to help us keep going, maybe through their example, their words or even just their company, because these things strengthen our heart, our will.

In our story today, once more we see Jesus calling someone to follow Him, to be His disciple. Can you remember his name? It was...Matthew. Now, can you also remember what Matthew’s job was? Matthew was a tax collector and tax collectors were not liked...

very much. They were employed **by the Romans**, who everybody hated, and Matthew's job was to make sure people paid a certain amount of money to the Romans. But tax collectors were also a bit of a bad bunch, because they'd usually charge too much and so they would get rich on the extra money. **This meant that** everyone hated them as well, because they were traitors for helping the Romans, and they were bad because they got rich at the expense of others.

So, here comes Jesus and He calls Matthew, a tax collector, to be His disciple. Matthew was being invited into relationship, invited into God's purpose, just like the other disciples were last week. But Matthew's story teaches us something else as well.

Matthew would have been despised, he would have been an outcast, with a group of friends you could only trust as far as you could throw them. But Jesus calls Matthew and then goes home with him to have a meal. That was a big deal back then because there **was an old saying** that said: ‘to share a meal is to share a life.’ The people you ate with were the people you accepted and welcomed into your life.

So, Jesus is doing something special here, in particular with Matthew. **Jesus is inviting Matthew** into a new family, a new place where he belongs. Matthew is no longer going to be known simply as “the tax collector”; he’s now a disciple of Jesus, he’s in relationship with Jesus, and as **Jesus will say later**, ‘...whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister.’

That goes for all the disciples – to every one of them, to every one of us: Jesus gives us an invitation to relationship and to purpose, but we don't do it alone, to help us keep going, to give us heart and strength, **Jesus invites us into His family, the family of God. This is more than just a loose collection of acquaintances or superficial friendships; we are called to be family together, in all the seasons of life.**

In our current season this is especially important. You may have heard that the elders at Brightons have decided not to open up the church sanctuary for worship just now. It is their decision to make and they weighed up all the issues and feedback. Currently, things are very limited in what we can do in worship and who could attend, and it was felt by the elders that such a worship environment...

would not offer as meaningful an experience for the majority of people than what is currently available online, on via CD or in printed format.

Nevertheless, the elders are aware that maybe what we most **yearn for right now** is community, to see one another and to be family together. There are probably many ways we could do this, from watching the Sunday service together with a neighbour (though without singing); or inviting some someone round for a cuppa, whether outdoors or indoors. But there may be other ideas as well, so if you have an idea about how we could be family together, then please get in contact and help us be family in this time. Equally, if you are feeling isolated and want support, then get in contact as well or try something new.

For example, your picture in for Community Corner, **or joining** the pre-service Zoom Cuppa. This runs from 10 to 10.40 every Sunday morning, and you don't need to use a computer or tablet, you can just phone in and talk to a group of other people from the church. And because we are family, there are people around who are willing to help you get connected, so please just ask if you want to give it a try.

Matthew was being invited into a new family, the family of God, but in this story of Matthew's call to follow Jesus, we see something else. Matthew is also invited into forgiveness, to have peace with God. **Jesus said**, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick...I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.' Jesus comes with the invitation to know the forgiveness of God,...

which is central to what God wishes to give us, because sin has broken our relationship with God, it has broken our relationship with others, it has broken this world, even ourselves. Jesus, the Great Physician, comes to forgive sin as part of the means of healing this world.

We see in the Old Testament, that the heart of God is for us to know peace, *shalom*, which we might describe as ‘wholeness’ today. It includes peace with God, peace with others, peace within yourself, peace of soul and mind. Jesus comes with the invitation to begin a journey towards wholeness. **Matthew had lost his way**, he’d gone down a wrong track; he was broken on the inside, he was broken in his relationship with others, he was broken in his relationship with God – yet in every dimension of Matthew’s life, Jesus offers healing, He offers wholeness.

And as Matthew begins to experience this, he naturally invites others into that experience for themselves, to meet with Jesus, this God-man, who has authority to forgive, to heal the soul, and change our lives forever.

Friends, will we respond like Matthew to Jesus? Will we take up His calling to follow, to be family, to show a scandalous generosity towards others? **You can't do that** by staying removed, or just looking out for yourself – you have to start looking out to others, and rather than seeing them as people who don't meet your mark, you have to show mercy, loving-kindness, the 'hesed' covenant love of God.

Yet, all of us have failed in this at some point, and so all of us are broken on the inside, we need the healing...

of Jesus, we need His forgiveness. I wonder, will you respond to the invitation of Jesus? To family and to wholeness? I pray it be so. Amen.

We close our time together with our final hymn...

HYMN *MP-54*

Bind us together, Lord