

The Call of St. Matthew (Mark 2:13-17)

I'm going to lead us through a prayerful meditation on Jesus' call of Matthew. I want you close your eyes and just let this Scripture wash over you . . . , let it invite you into the narrative as it unfolds. I'm going to read it a few times.

13 Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. 14 As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him. 15 While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. 16 When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 17 On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Listen to it again.

Put yourself into this narrative. Listen to the sounds in the marketplace, the jangling of coins, the haggling between Matthew and peasant farmers over their tax bills. Feel the heat of the sun on your face and smell the fresh baked breads and other foods in various stalls.

Jesus comes by and calls Matthew. Matthew responds and follows Jesus. He doesn't question, he doesn't haggle. Use your sanctified imagination to enter into Matthew's mindset. Is Matthew ready to be a follower, a learner? Is he tired of his sin? Has he had enough of the pursuit of money and self-advancement and does he long for wholeness, to be part of God's renewing work?

When Jesus calls him, Matthew is likely a mess.

Listen to it again.

Put yourself in Matthew's place. Jesus calls you, and you follow. You invite Jesus to your house, and a bit later some Pharisees – the self-appointed God-squad – are going to show up and question Jesus as to why he would ever call someone like you. Jesus is going to say that he didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners. He knows all about your brokenness, the ways you fail to meet the standard, your contradictions, doubts, fears, inner turmoil. So you know that Jesus regards you with grace – he loves you with a love that can't be captured with words, the love that longs to see others flourish in God's kingdom. In the middle of the meal, Jesus turns to you and speaks with you. You have a few minutes of private conversation. Jesus knows you; he knows why he has called you. What is it that Jesus says to you? What do you need to hear from him? What are the words of grace he speaks?

(After a pause for contemplation, read it once again, and close with "Amen")