

11<sup>th</sup> June 2023

**Matthew 9:9-13**

**FOLLOW ME!**

Have you ever found yourself in a situation, where it seemed that the best, or only way, to get out of it was to follow someone you didn't really know, or even didn't know at all? It may have meant following them literally, physically, or following their advice or guidance in some way. While it might take us a little while to come up with a situation like this for ourselves, it is very likely that we have all, at least once, found ourselves in that position where the best or only way out of it was to trust and follow someone we didn't really know.

Here's one I prepared earlier: Many of you would remember that the summer of 2010-11 was another time when Queensland had a lot of floods. We were living in Gladstone (central Queensland) at that time, and straight after Christmas Karen and I took advantage of my parents staying with us to leave the kids with them and go off to Hervey Bay for a few days alone. It rained the whole drive down there, for the three days we were in Hervey Bay I don't think it stopped raining, and to top it all off, as we were driving home just as we had got through Maryborough we were stopped and turned around because the highway was cut by floodwaters. So, another night stuck in a motel room. The next morning, very early, we checked and found that the highway was now open, and very happily drove through the point where we had been stopped at the day before and headed home.

But a bit further down the road, just south of the town of Gin Gin, we rounded a corner to be confronted by another long line of stopped traffic; the highway was now cut here. We went from feeling high to low very quickly. After checking it out, and realising our only option was to go back to Maryborough, as we were walking back to our car a line of cars went past us, and the lady in the last one yelled out the window, 'the bloke up the front knows a back way around!' What to do? Take a risk and follow a person we'd never even seen or spoken to, or go back and wait for who knew how many days until we could get back home to the kids again? So, we followed. Very quickly what was just a small dirt farm track got very muddy with so many cars now using it, and not for the first time we regretted that because

there was just the two of us we had driven down in our little hatchback Yaris instead of our Prado 4WD. But, with no small amount of concern, we got through, and finally we were back on the highway and headed home. We never knew the man who we had followed around, didn't know the kind of person he was, and we never had the chance to thank him. But, in our time of need, he called, and we followed.

When we are lost, or frustrated, or desperate, or concerned, we are much more likely to follow the one who calls us and offers a new and better way.

You've got to wonder if that is how Matthew felt, at least a bit, when, as he was going about his work of being a tax-collector, one day a Jewish teacher came along and said to him, 'Follow me'. Why did he then leave everything and follow Jesus, become one of the disciples, and even, as many people believe, write this Gospel account of Jesus' life in which we read this story today? Was it because Jesus had some kind of charisma, some quality, which we see not just here but in many other occurrences, and which caused many people to follow or seek Him out? Had Matthew either heard and seen Jesus himself already, or heard about Him from others, so he already had a bit of an interest in finding out about this man? Or, as a tax-collector, so even though he might be getting rich from his job he was despised and outcast from his own Jewish people for both cheating them and serving the Roman overlords, was Matthew feeling lost, frustrated, concerned, and needing a way out to a new life? Or, quite possibly, was Matthew leaving everything and at once following Jesus a combination of these things coming together? What we are told here is very brief, so all we know is that when Jesus called, Matthew got up, left everything, and followed Him.

Jesus comes to us, and calls us where we are, as we are, with all that we are, to follow Him. One of the things we know about Matthew is that he was seen by his society and by Jewish Law as being a sinner, and so an outsider, someone any decent person wouldn't want to be associated with and certainly not someone who was thought to be worthy of God's love. And yet, Jesus not only calls Matthew, but also goes to eat at his house; sharing a meal with those who are seen by the 'holy crowd' to be unworthy. We know that stirring things up like this is something Jesus made a habit of doing.

Like Matthew, Jesus comes to us where we are, whatever we are doing, even if we think we are unworthy, and calls us to follow Him. But unlike the guy we followed on a detour around flood waters, and perhaps unlike Matthew, we all know Who it is that we now follow. We know we are called to follow by

the One who in God's love was sent to live His life for us, to give His life for our forgiveness, and then to rise so we can truly have new life with Him. As He invites us to share a meal with Him regularly in our worship services, we know that we see and touch and taste His love, His acceptance, His call to us, as we share this meal. Just like we are more likely to follow someone if we are lost or need help to find a way out, and like Matthew may well have been feeling like that when he was called to follow, Jesus comes to us and calls us when we are worried about the future for ourselves and others, when we have hurts or anger we find it hard to move on from or forgive and let go, when we have a sadness or a grief we can't face and live through alone, when we struggle with where we are and where we're going in life, when we have relationships which just aren't the way we thought they would be or we want them to be, and sometimes, when we don't really know why but we feel like we are stuck, or lost, or down. At all of these times, and all the time, Jesus is calling to us to follow Him, to know His love, His forgiveness, His grace in our lives. He is calling us to a life in God's love which we know helps us as we face and move through what we face now.

To follow means that we know we can trust God as we go with Him. In the two accounts we have here following Matthew's call we see what this means in a very practical way. In the first, a woman who has been sick for 12 years in a way which means she is outcast from her religion and society, shows her faith and trust in knowing that just by touching Jesus she will be healed. In faith she follows, and she is healed. In the second a man whose daughter has already died comes to Jesus and asks Him to raise her. Jesus came, the girl was raised, and through his faithful following her father's life was turned around. When we follow Jesus, we are not following a stranger, or someone who might be able to help us out. We are following the One who shows us what God's love is really all about, so we know that following Him is what can and does turn our lives around.

The call to 'Follow me', also of course means leaving some things behind. For Matthew it meant leaving his profitable but unpopular job as a tax collector, and now travelling from town to town with literally just the clothes on his back. In our first reading for today we heard how God told Abraham to leave his family, his country, and go to a completely new life. The call to follow involves leaving behind what gets in the way of our following. What does that look like for you? What we are called to leave behind

might be something in our attitude towards others; selfishness, anger or pride which makes it hard to forgive or accept others. It might be a strong preference for how things should be done, or how people should act, or that our way is always the best way. Or, as much as there is nothing wrong with them themselves, what we are called to leave behind might be our reliance on the 'things' which are a part of our life and can get in the way of us spending time with God, worshipping Him, following Him with our lives. The call to follow is the call to both trust God and to seek to put our lives wholly behind Him.

'Follow me'. I wonder if you've thought yet of a time when you have followed someone and it turned out well? Or perhaps you followed someone and it didn't turn out well? I'm thankful that when we followed someone on wet back roads we didn't end up bogged and making fools of ourselves by being there in our little car. But we know enough about God's love for us, as we see it in Jesus, to know that taking up the call to follow Him isn't a blind risk, but that it leads us to the life of fullness and peace we all want to have. We also know from what we read about those who followed God's call in the Bible, that this call is both a comfort and a challenge; as we know God's grace and forgiveness in our lives, we are called to leave behind everything which stops us living in and living out this call to follow Him. 'Follow me', Jesus says to each one of us, 'for in me you find forgiveness, you find peace, you find purpose, and as you follow me through you I can help others to come to know these things also'. Amen.

### **FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION**

- Can you think of a time when to get yourself out of a bad or hard situation, you had to 'follow' someone you didn't really know, ie, you weren't totally sure you could trust them?
- What do you think it was about Jesus that many people did immediately follow Him when He called to them?
- What does following Jesus bring to you in your life now? How does it help you in your life? What does being with Him enable you to face?
- The call to follow is a call to know the comfort of God's love, but also a challenge to leave behind anything that gets in the way of us fully following this call. What gets in the way of you fully following God's call to trust in and share His love? What do you find it difficult leave behind or let go of? Pray for God's help in doing this.

Pray: thank God that He calls each one of us, whoever we are, whatever we do, however unworthy we might feel, to follow Him and know His love and grace in our lives. Ask Him to help us to leave behind those things we find it difficult to let go of so that we can fully take up His call.

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