

THE EMMAUS SERIES

TENTH SUNDAY, YEAR A

Hosea 6: 3-6

Romans 4: 18-25

Matthew 9: 9-13

A number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at table with Jesus

The main lesson of this gospel, of course, concerns the generous and merciful ways of God shown in the heart-warming scene of Jesus at table with the outcasts of society. In that culture, it was unthinkable for most people to mix with these outcasts, much less sit at table with them. But God's ways are shaped by generosity, not by fashions of respectability.

Like all good stories, portraying real life in its complexity, the stories of the gospel put us in a reflective mood - we attempt to read between the lines and fill out the missing details. The radical decision made by Matthew the tax collector, reminds that life is a process. This decision to leave all things and follow Jesus must have been prepared for by previous decisions and attitudes. Taxes were collected on important thoroughfares. Matthew – or Levi, as he is called in the other gospels – would probably have seen the teacher from Nazareth pass with his followers on various occasions. He must have been open enough, to glimpse the possibility of a radical renewal of his life, when he came to know about the gospel announced by Jesus. Perhaps he had joined the crowd to listen to him. It would be a decision that cost him a great deal. Ultimately - who knows after what deliberations – he mustered up the generosity to give up his previous security and throw in his lot with Jesus.

Reflecting on Matthew's experience helps us to get in touch with the process of our own lives – shaped and reshaped by the decisions we make. We too have a personal call from the Risen Lord. From all eternity, from the countless individuals he could have brought into existence, he chose us; and he gives us a task in life that is uniquely ours. At times, Jesus warns us, it will call for sacrifice and generosity. But what we are asked to do will be tailored to our capabilities. When Jesus called Matthew, he already recognised the kind of person he was. When he was later called to be one of the Twelve Apostles, he was expected to exercise his qualities of leadership – something that is born out in the fact that one of the first Christian communities identified with a tradition that bears his name. It tells us a lot about Matthew's early potential as a leader, when we reflect that he had gathered 'a number of tax collectors and sinners' to his house to meet Jesus. Matthew comes across as the kind of person we need in the task of evangelisation – down to earth, friendly with all kinds of people without being judgmental, those who have themselves begun to know the joy and new life that comes from identifying with the generous ways of the gospel

The prophet Hosea, who gives us our first reading, is another interesting example of how the Lord's call takes account of a person's life experience. That the prophet is a very sensitive person is evident in the poetic imagery he uses in this passage. This sensitive man's life experience has been tragic: his wife has been unfaithful to him. As he struggled to lead her back to their 'first love', he was inspired to compare the love of the God of the covenant with the love of a wronged husband. He tells the people that despite their infidelities, Yahweh longs to renew the relationship of trust and fidelity he made with them through the covenant of Mount Sinai.

Two very different stories, that derive their power from the fact that they tell of a meeting with the Gospel – the Good News of God's ways.

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