

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?



"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." ~ Matthew 9

THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA

"Sometimes you have to create what you want to be a part of."

This season we have been celebrating the birth of an idea. The idea was expressed as a child filled with all the potential in the universe. We think of the parents, the people and the places that hosted the idea, but the church that celebrates the birth of Jesus was centuries away from its existence. And the idea of a democratic church like ours where leaders are elected from the people and people believed that they had direct access to God without an intermediary was just a hope, and maybe not even that.

Our scripture today comes not from the time of the birth of the idea, but from some of Jesus' most mature teachings.

He said that people need to be forgiven, and not immobilized by laws that they can never fully obey.

"Sometimes you have to create what you want to be a part of."

Jesus said that the invitation to be part of that community of healing and forgiveness was not just to the aristocratic and powerful, but that the blessings of forgiveness and mercy were for everyone. Jesus could find no better example of a person who needed to be humanized than Matthew, the tax collector, who sat at the entry to the city of Capernaum and extracted a tax upon everyone who entered it, and he kept some of each tax he collected for himself. Even a man like this could be saved.

"Sometimes you have to create what you want to be a part of."

When Jesus was criticized for associating with outcasts and sinners he said he ministered to these because they were the ones who were sick and needed a doctor. In the days before medicine and hospitals, ministry to the sick was the function of priests. And frankly, the priests didn't have much medicine in their bag. What Jesus was saying was that if priests won't take care of the sinners, then let me and those who follow me take care of people like this. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to the kingdom of God.

SO HERE IS OUR SCRIPTURE TODAY:

Matthew 9:1-13

The power to forgive

1. Jesus stepped into a boat, crossed over and came to his own town.
2. Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."
3. At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"
4. Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?"
5. Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?

6. But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home."
7. And the man got up and went home.

The invitation to be a disciple offered to a sinner

8. When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.
9. As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

Able bodied or ill?

10. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples.
11. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and `sinners'?"
12. On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.
13. But go and learn what this means: `I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."



**SO HERE IS THE IDEA
THAT WAS BORN:**

- The power to forgive – we all have it and can use it.
- The invitation to be a disciple offered to a sinner – no one is beyond the love of Christ.
- Healthy or hurting? Jesus ministered to the sick of body and mind, and at some time, that is each of us.

POWER TO FORGIVE

Throughout the gospels we discover that Jesus has the power to forgive sins. And when he uses the power to forgive sins, it is offered as an example of something disciples should emulate. This story has parallels in each of the four gospels.

The dispute focuses on Jesus' remark that the sins of the paralytic have been forgiven. This was interpreted by critics as blasphemy, since Jesus appeared to be speaking on behalf of God. Jesus equates the forgiveness of sins with the cure (it was widely believed that physical disabilities were the result of sin, either on the part of children or their parents). We know that they are not.

From Matthew 9:9: As Jesus was walking along there, he caught sight of a man sitting at the toll booth, one named Matthew, and he says to him, "Follow me!" And he got up and followed him.

FOLLOW ME.

Matthew reproduces Mark's story of the enlistment of the first disciples, except that the name is changed from Levi to Matthew. It is uncertain whether Matthew and Levi are the same person.

The call of Matthew is comparable to the call of other disciples in Mark, Luke and John, except that it is briefer.

Jesus certainly had followers, both men and women.

"Follow me" probably arose in connection with a saying like Luke 9:59, where Jesus invites a stranger to follow him. The stranger responds, "First, let me go and bury my father," as a way of postponing his decision. But Jesus urged him to follow life, and join him in his ministry.

ABLE-BODIED AND SICK

“Since when do the able-bodied need a doctor? It's the sick who do” is a secular proverb. It may also have been used to justify Jesus' own association with social outcasts, especially with those who were sick or disabled.

In point of fact, modern medicine would agree whole-heartedly that the mind can and does influence the physical condition of the body, and that a person can never have a healthy body when his mind is not in a healthy state.

TO DINE WITH SINNERS

Matthew uses this story as an example of a new power given to his disciples. It is the power to heal. People didn't realize that they had that power. But sometimes you have to create the world that you want to be part of.

So Jesus reclined at dinner at Peter's house with the man who sat at the tollbooth and his cronies, and others who neglected or opposed the religious laws. Jesus was the chief guest, and the people who knew about this dinner began to circulate the rumor that the good teacher eats with tax collectors and sinners. Why? Because love dictates it. A medical doctor does not judge those whom he treats. Jesus rejected the idea that illness was produced by sin, but that those who were ill needed compassion no matter where their illness came from. The savior sat in the midst of sinners, some of whom were plainly unrighteous, guilty even of graft and extortion, which Jesus did not condone. But he saw the human inside the circumstance, and so he ministered to the person not the politics. This is in the Bible because the early church said that we should go and do likewise.

SO WE CREATE THE WORLD WE WANT TO LIVE IN

You don't have to like everybody, but you have to love everybody.

If the world is not going in the direction of our faith, then we need to create the world in which we wish to live.

That might be true of your family.

That might be true of the attitude we bring toward people about whom we don't know very much.

We don't come to Christ because we are without problems. It is just the reverse; we come to Christ because we have problems.

REPAIRS ARE WHAT WE DO

My brother-in-law sells automobiles. He's proud of the cars he sells.

But cars break down, and so people often tell him that they have an unusual noise in the engine, there is a rattle in the back end, one of the lights has stopped working. And he says, “Bring it into the shop and we'll fix it.”

I asked him once if he didn't get tired of having conversations with people about what is wrong with their cars. He said, “That's what we do; we fix broken cars. Parts and repairs account for half our business.”

I guess I could say the same, and so could our church.

Don't you get tired of people with problems, dysfunctional families, the sadness of illness, phone calls at inconvenient times, and people who always seem to have an issue?

**Yes, we get tired, but that's our job.
We have no other job than that.
We fix things that are broken.**

**In the case of people who work in the church, things that are broken are often people with broken hearts or battered hopes.
We have to see beyond the symptoms.
Our job is to get the proportions right so that the joys balance the concerns.
And we have to create the world we want to be part of.**

OUR TRAJECTORY FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

This is a good lesson to give our church a trajectory for the year ahead.

We will associate with broken things, and we will fix them.

We will associate with people who are sick and with people who have sinned, and we will heal them and we will forgive them.

We will associate with people who don't know things, and we will educate them.

We will associate with people who want to find a way to express the faith inside them through music, art, drama, and dialog, and we will make that happen.

Do not grow tired of doing good.

Create the good world in which you want to live.

And remember that our gospel is about healing and curing, not creating more illness, more judgment and more anger.

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?

Yes. We worship in a house of doctors to whom Jesus has given the power to heal to everyone who is in need of repair and restoration.



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