

The call of Matthew -Three healings

To steal a line from an old 60's song: What becomes of the broken hearted? The human condition breaks the heart of us all, at one time or another. Jesus is the healer of the brokenhearted. He came and comes to heal, to lift up, renew, and even restore life. In these readings the power of the Word made flesh, the authority of Jesus, is revealed.

Matthew left the life he had known to become a tax collector for the Romans. A collaborator with the oppressor. Tax collectors were scorned, even despised by the populace. Matthew's family and neighbors would have shunned him. He gathered taxes for the Romans, if he demanded more than was due – as many tax collectors did, we do not know.

Why did Matthew become a tax collector? Why does anyone become a collaborator with the enemy, the oppressor. Disillusionment? Greed? Desire for power over one's fellows? For whatever reason, Matthew was estranged from his family, and friends; and he could no longer worship the God of his fathers with his community.

Thomas Wolfe' wrote that "you can't go home again." How true that is – the home remembered is changed by time and events and so is the one who leaves. Even so, one cannot entirely leave home either.

In Matthew's heart was the memory of the songs of praise and prayers, the psalms, and the prophets. Our hearts do not forget the songs our mothers sang. Things written in our hearts when we are very young. Although Matthew could no longer worship with those whom he had known since boyhood, he had not forgotten, even if he could not have fellowship with them. He was dead to them. His very presence at the toll gate a

slap in the face to his people. Nonetheless, remarkably, Jesus called Matthew to follow - and he followed. A despised outcast, Matthew became one of the twelve disciples closest to Jesus.

A leader of the synagogue, desperate with grief and wild with hope, falls to his knees before Jesus to plead for the life of his little daughter – although she is dead! Faith or desperation speaks: “my daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.” Do not doubt that she was dead. Death was well known, its presence recognized by a people all too familiar with it. The professional mourners had already been called in by the time Jesus arrived. Jesus took her by the hand, calling the child out of death into life. Even there, the voice of Jesus is heard, and the child got up, awakened to life.

As the psalmist confesses: Where can I go then from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I climb up to heaven, you are there; If I make the grave my bed, you are there also. Psalm 139:7

A woman with a hemorrhage moves through the crowd, her total focus is on reaching Jesus as he is passing by. She knows the law says she cannot be out among people; brushing up against someone, even briefly, would defile them. She is determined. Jesus alone can save her from the imprisoning condition that has robbed her of her life as a woman. She can do nothing that defines who she is. She cannot be in a marital relationship, she cannot prepare food, she cannot keep the house, she cannot touch anyone; she cannot join others in worship. She is isolated and cut off from everything

that holds meaning for her life. She is dead to herself. She has no worth in her community.

In her heart, mind, and soul she believes Jesus can heal her – all she needs is to touch his garment – she pushes through the crowd just in time to touch his garment as he passes by. Jesus turns, sees her, and says to her, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And with that she is healed - fully restored, to herself and to her community.

Jesus comes to heal. Heal the disillusioned, the despairing, the rejected and alienated, those with withered hope, shame and guilt. He comes to bind up the brokenhearted, strengthen and encourage, bringing new life and hope. His love and acceptance is balm for the soul, inspiration for the human spirit.

What becomes of the brokenhearted? Those whose spirits and hopes have died?

Matthew was dead to his people, and restrained and estranged in practice from the God of his fathers. “The Lord will make good his purpose for me...” So said the psalmist. Psalm 138:9

A child, dead to life in this world and a father with a broken heart. In healing the child, Jesus healed the father. “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted/ and will save those whose spirits are crushed.” Psalm 34:18

A woman, without dignity, who is dead to herself, and separated from community. Healed. “O Lord my God, I cried out to you, and you restored me to health. Psalm 30:2

Jesus called Matthew – just as he was as he stood in at the toll gate. A synagogue leader's plea, a child healed. Jesus did not ask if he was good man, if he deserved to have his plea answered; he did ask why had he not taken better care of his child. Jesus did not scold the woman for daring to touch his garment and ritually defile him. Jesus comes to bind up the brokenhearted, to heal, to restore hope, to give life, abundant life.

As the prophet Isaiah said: "He has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted..." Isaiah 61:1

We do not know what will come of answering our Lord's call to follow. Matthew certainly had not anticipated becoming a follower of the One, the promised Messiah, he did not know what lay ahead – the wonder, pain, despair and beauty, and eventually the great faith that would carry him as an evangelist to Ethiopia where he would be martyred as he stood at the altar during the mass. Or so says the legend.

When we say yes with all that is in us, unexpected, wonderful, fearful, exciting, soul-expanding things can and do happen. Desperate or desiring, doubtful or seeking we will find and be found; as the prophet Jerimiah spoke of the Lord: "when you seek me with all your heart, you will find me." Jerimiah 29:13.

We cannot envision all that lies ahead when we seek the Lord, when we answer the call to follow. We can know this for certain: Jesus, Christ, is the healer of all our wounds and our souls' disorders. Amen.