

EASTER - 7

"I did not come to invite virtuous people, but sinners. Mark 2:13

1. The calling of Levi - later to be named Matthew. Almost hypnotic influence of Jesus. 'He saw Levi, son of Alphaeus at his seat in the custom house, and said to him, "Follow me". Levi rose and followed him'. This is how St. Mark described the calling of Levi the tax-collector - never popular in any society. but in this part of the world at this particular time, tax collectors were hated. Levi - a Jew - was probably employed by Herod the King and was therefore regarded as a traitor by the Jewish people. Jesus offered his friendship to the man whom most other people would have scorned.

2. Levi invited Jesus to a meal in his house - he also invited some of his friends and colleagues. Jesus brought with him some of his friends also and there were some doctors of the law - learned men - scholars in the scriptures of the Hebrew people - they were the Pharisees. They criticised Jesus for mixing with these tax gatherers and sinners. This all added up to a rather tense situation. What a party! A situation rather like a meeting in Belfast with Gerry Adams and his friends having supper with Ian Paisley and his colleagues with a few members of the peace movement. Long silences interrupted with comments about the weather. Jesus takes the initiative and speaks from the heart; "It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick; I did not come to invite virtuous people, but sinners".

3. There were three groups of people at this party; Levi and his friends, Jesus and his friends, and the Pharisees. Which of them thought of themselves as sinners I wonder? St. Mark reports

that 'there were many bad characters'. On a superficial level, Levi and his pals were known to be people who did not observe the religious laws which were so dear to the Pharisees. They were Jews in a racial sense only. They did not attend the Temple services, they did not keep the Sabbath, and they did not observe the diet laws. They were commonly called 'sinners'. The Pharisees on the other hand were meticulous in their observance of all these things - they were commonly called 'righteous' people. The disciples of Jesus were a mixed bunch of radicals - somewhat confused by the teaching of Jesus but they were devoted to him - except of course, for the one who betrayed him.

3. Where would we place ourselves if we were invited to this party? There is an old saying which claims that the human race is divided into two groups of people. There are the sinners, who believe that they are saints, and there are the saints who know that they are sinners. St. Paul wrote in Romans 3:23, "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" - and later in the same letter he wrote "God commended his love towards us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". (5:8)

5. To conclude -

- a) however unworthy we may feel, God loves us, and Christ died for us. Every time we receive communion the Priest says “Draw near with faith, receive the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ which he gave for you, and his Blood which he shed for you. Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving”. However difficult this concept may be to understand, the act of communion is central to our faith and assures us of our Saviour’s love towards each one of us – as we are.
- b) however unworthy we think others are, God loves them also, and Christ died for them also. Jesus forbids us to judge one another. He alone knows the secrets of our hearts. He is the friend of sinners – he did not come to invite virtuous people, but sinners. Remember the words of Jesus to the crowd who were about to stone a young woman who had committed adultery – ‘If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her’.
- c)
- d) **AMEN**

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HYMNS

122, 230, 259, 217

NOTICES

This evening at 6 pm. United Service at St. Peter’s Langtoft

Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. Holy Communion with Imposition of ashes at 7.30 pm. at All Saints’ Thwing

Thursday 7.30 pm. – Steering Committee at the Rectory

Next Sunday

9 am. Holy Communion at Foxholes

9.30 am. Family Service at Thwing

11 am. Family Service at Langtoft

11 am. Eucharist at Foxholes

2.30 pm. Family Service at Butterwick