

It might seem surprising that, following the entire Easter season of Resurrection power, Pentecost, Trinity, and Corpus Christi, we should return to the call of Matthew as a disciple of the Lord! Looking at this call and the associated healing descriptions in today's gospel passage actually makes sense of what the season of Resurrection power really is saying to us.

The author Tryggve Mettinger, in his book *In Search of God*, talks about two kinds of call in the Hebrew Testament. There is the **Isaiah call**, in which the one called responds immediately: for example, in Isaiah chapter six we read, "Then I (that is, Isaiah) heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me'." The other kind of call is the **Moses call**: in the third and fourth chapters of the book Exodus, when from the burning bush the Lord calls Moses to go back to Egypt and deliver the Israelites from their slavery, Moses spends all of chapter three and half of chapter four, arguing with God about how unworthy he is, how he is slow of speech, and how the Israelites might not believe Who sent him. One call is immediate; one is argumentative and protracted, doubtful about the outcome.

Matthew responds in the mode of the Isaiah call and leaves everything to follow Jesus. Principally, he leaves

his desk, which is the symbol of his profession and of his sinfulness. The tax-collectors were the most despised of all in society because they were perceived to trouser a portion of the collected tax for their own benefit.

God never calls us *to* something without first calling us *away* from something; in Matthew's case a calling to follow the truth and away from sinfulness. God wants an Isaian response rather than a Mosaic one: immediate rather than argumentative and protracted. The underlying issue with the call of God is the issue of faith: do we trust God to know better than we, or not? The outcome of Matthew's call is the public demonstration of acceptance rather than rejection. Matthew has invited Jesus to eat with him and Jesus accepts. The authorities question why Jesus eats with tax-collectors and sinners, but Jesus shows in His call of Matthew that all people are of worth, their worth being shown in their rejection of past sinfulness.

The authorities are bound up in their desire for purity and ritual in their devotion to God. This purity and ritual takes away their compassion for others and their ability to see beyond the outward to the true worth of a person because the purity and ritual have become all-consuming. As one commentator says, there are far too many so-called faithful who tell us, and apparently also tell God, who can and cannot be called because they see the purity and ritual as the ultimate way to come before God.

It's poignant, here, that the acceptance, or lack of, for people is set in terms of eating. Eating together is an intimate activity; it's the symbol of acceptance and love, one for another. We gather around the table in the kitchen or dining room, eating and chatting about anything and everything and uniting together.

When we come here to the Mass, we eat together. We are in this one room where we consume the body and blood of our Lord in His wonderful, sacrificial gift, showing that in spite of our sinfulness — which is redeemed in the Easter victory — we are accepted without question in our Lord's sight and therefore we accept each other without question. This is what I meant at the beginning when I said that this gospel passage today reminds us of what the season of Resurrection power really is saying to us.

The second part of this gospel passage concerns healing, the healing linking it directly with the first part in the showing of acceptance and worth in all people. Additionally, this second part shows the element of true faith coming before our Lord.

A leader in the synagogue, who sees in Jesus something beyond the purity and ritual, comes to him and says, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." Here, from an unexpected source, we have a demonstration of pure faith in all its trust.

There's a social issue, here. The Jews in Jesus' time are not to touch a dead person for any reason. Touching a dead person in Jewish law means that a whole process of ritual purification has to be undertaken to cleanse the living person of all association with the one who has died. Hence the reason, perhaps, why the Priest and the Levite pass by the possibly-dead victim in the story of the Samaritan's goodness in St Luke's gospel. In this instance, it's the leader who asks Jesus to touch his daughter and restore her to life. Jesus does touch her, but the touching is not transgressing the law but overriding the whole concept of ritual impurity with compassion.

The leader's daughter is restored to life in Jesus' touch.

On the way to the leader's house, there is another moment included. A woman who has been afflicted with a flow of blood for twelve years comes in the crowd and says, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." She is restored to full health.

This additional act of healing in this gospel passage is an important moment for two reasons: first, this moment reveals that it's the woman *herself* who simply touches Jesus' garment, unknown to Him, whereas the leader whose daughter has died asks Jesus to give a life-giving touch. Jesus responds in both cases, to the one who asks and to the one who takes the initiative. Both are healed completely.

The second reason is that these three encounters—Matthew’s call, the leader’s request, and the woman’s initiative—speak to us of the way in which faith takes form. Faith means to trust, as we heard exemplified so poignantly in Abraham in the reading from St Paul’s Letter to the Romans. Therefore Matthew’s immediate response to Jesus’ call is to trust that what will follow will change his life—he doesn’t know how, but he trusts; the leader’s request for Jesus to touch his daughter is to recognise in Jesus where the fullness of life lies and to trust that Jesus’ touch will restore his daughter; the woman with the twelve-year haemorrhage simply trusts that, even only touching Jesus’ garment, with no exchange of words, will be sufficient for her total cure.

These are superb qualities of true faith in three different contexts. The challenge for all of us as the observers, clergy included, might well be to ask ourselves where the trust element lies in our own faith. Are we convinced beyond doubt that our faith is sufficient for all our needs or is there something more we require? It reminds me of the rich young man whom Jesus called to follow him and he refused because he had many possessions. We are left to consider where we stand.

This morning’s Collect is particularly apposite for this gospel passage:

O God, the strength of all those who put their trust in you, mercifully accept our prayers and, because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without you, grant us the help of your grace, that in the keeping of your commandments we may please you both in will and deed.

In the name of the + Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**