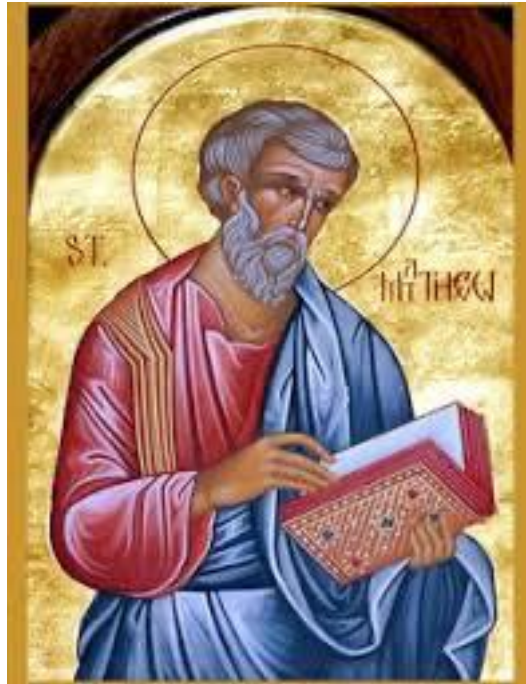


Reflections & Prayers for Sunday 20th September 2020

MATTHEW, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST



Proverbs Chapter 3 verses 13 - 18

Happy are those who find wisdom, and those who get understanding, for her income is better than silver, and her revenue better than gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

**She is a tree of life
to those who lay hold of her;
those who hold her fast
are called happy.**



Psalm 119. 65 - 72

**You have dealt graciously with your servant:
according to your word, O Lord.
O teach me true understanding and knowledge:
for I have trusted in your commandments.**

**Before I was afflicted I went astray:
but now I keep your word.
You are gracious and do good:
O Lord, teach me your statutes.**

**The proud have smeared me with lies:
but I will keep your commandments with my whole heart.
Their heart has become gross with fat:
but my delight is in your law.**

**It is good for me that I have been afflicted:
that I may learn your statutes.
The law of your mouth is dearer to me:
than a hoard of gold and silver.**

2 Corinthians Chapter 4 verses 1 - 6

God has been kind enough to trust us with this work. That's why we never give up. We don't do shameful things that must be kept secret. And we don't try to fool anyone or twist God's message around. God is our witness that we speak the truth, so others can be sure that we can be trusted. If there is anything hidden about our message, it is hidden only to someone who is lost. The god who rules this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers. They cannot see the light, which is the good news about our glorious Christ, who shows what God is like. We are not preaching about ourselves. Our message is that Jesus Christ is Lord. He also sent us to be your servants. The Scriptures say, "God commanded light to shine in the dark." Now God is shining in our hearts to let you know that his glory is seen in Jesus Christ.



The Gospel of Matthew Chapter 9 verses 9 - 13

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

Reflection

As Jesus went along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth and he said to him 'Follow me'

Today the Church remembers and gives thanks for Matthew, apostle and evangelist whose actual feast day is tomorrow 21st September.

Our gospel passage recounts the call of Matthew, the tax collector. He was sitting at the tax booth when Jesus walked by and said to him,

‘follow me’. He got up and followed him. This all sounds so easy, as if you didn’t need to do a whole lot of things before you could do just that - follow Jesus, follow him in a completely new way and no doubt somewhere new. Two unexpected words which changed Matthew’s life, words which must surely resonate within each of us in one way or another. I remember playing follow the leader when I was in school, it was great fun because you didn’t know where you were going but you trusted the one who was leading you and everybody else in the line, then I think of the film Sister Act with Whoopi Goldberg singing ‘I will follow him, follow him wherever he may go’, and then the words resonate deep inside, follow me, follow me.....unexpected words which always carry an element of risk because you never quite know what is going to happen, and for some that can bring fear and anxiety of the unknown.

Jesus was always doing the unexpected, he was very often at odds with the religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees, because on more than one occasion he failed to obey the letter of the law and even made it clear that being, what was inside a person was more important than rigorously obeying the letter of the law. Sharing a meal with a tax collector would make that person ritually unclean and therefore unable to take part in any religious service or even be able to associate with law abiding religious people. So to even consider a tax collector to become a disciple was the height of madness.

Tax collectors were scorned and hated by the Jews, they were seen as collaborators with the Roman invaders. Matthew was such a person, a tough, shrewd and cynical tax collector, a man willing to accept unpopularity in pursuit of his wealth. He was the lowest of the low and yet in a moment Jesus says to him ‘Come, follow me’ and he got up and followed, becoming one of his disciples. One of those who were not powerful and wealthy, even intelligent and educated as one might expect, but poor and uneducated, a few fishermen, a traitor, a collaborator.

I wonder why Matthew gave it all up to follow Jesus? It wasn’t to

be just a weekend adventure, but a call to a deep commitment which would involve the whole of his life. Could it be because of Jesus' charismatic personality? And yet Jesus never forces himself on anyone, many people met him and turned away unaffected by him.

Matthew could have said no, or perhaps it was because Jesus was willing to take him as a friend, just as he was, an invitation offered with love. Jesus said follow me, come as you are. God welcomes us today, not because of anything we've done or are, but because he loves us.

Jesus' mission is for all people. Matthews' life would change dramatically without question, but Jesus reached out to him just as he was. Jesus, the one who ate with sinners, with the outcast, with women, he did the unexpected and God is often unpredictable. Jesus did not ignore the way Matthew had lived but he underlined the fact that there was a better way with him. The change depended on Matthew growing nearer to our Lord, seeking healing and wholeness through him.

What did Jesus see in Matthew that made him believe it was worthwhile calling him? We will never know. What we do know however is that Jesus didn't write him off, he saw possibilities in him. He has faith in ordinary human beings like you and me, he comes to ordinary fallible people. Those with mixed motives, those whose lives are inconsistent and he invites them to share in his mission and kingdom. Every step we take with him is entirely up to us, the choice is ours, to accept or reject his call, but if we accept we will change and know new life in him. And for those who choose to leave it, God will still them as well.

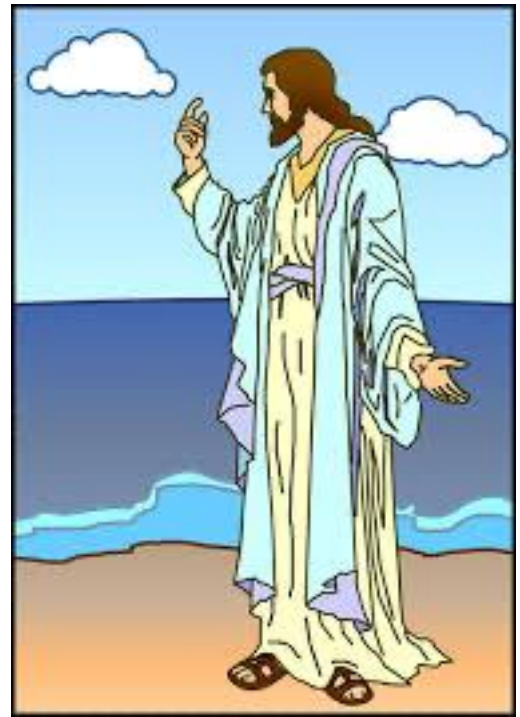
Jesus does the unexpected and God is unpredictable. Contact with him is two way. As he calls us to share his life he waits for an invitation to share ours and the change depends on us growing close to him. And if Jesus saw a future for a man like Matthew then there's hope for us. God doesn't keep any of us at arms length until we are good enough to meet him, his arms are open, waiting.

Today we thank God for Matthew who was able to hear the

confidence in Jesus and stand beside him.

We thank God for the unexpected in our lives and for his call to each of us that we too may continue to follow him and work for his unique mission for the Church in this place and time.

Amen.



Revd Anne Golledge - Team Vicar

Let us Pray



**Enable us, Lord Jesus,
to carry the reality of the Kingdom
deep in our hearts.
Save us from little-mindedness
and the fears
that would deny others
their part in the good things
given for all to enjoy.**

**Lead us in the ways of true fellowship
in our homes,
in our churches,
and in the world at large.**



**If I can reach the day
when there is:
- No one towards whom I feel enmity.
- No one I want to steal a march on.
- No one I want to spite or put in their place.
- No victory I want to win over others,
but only victories
with and for others.
Surely, Lord,
in that moment,
I shall have entered your Kingdom.**

AMEN