

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 15th February 2009

Good News – for the Bad News.... Matt 9:9-13



Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Matthew was a tax collector but (unlike the Inland Revenue) first century tax collectors were considered traitors as they worked for the Romans; they robbed the people. So Bad News! Maybe some of us think of ourselves as unlikeable, or maybe we have done things that have surely (we think) put us outside the reach of God. If so, please listen to last week's sermon on the web (and Paul's the week before if you can). Simon last week explained that even though we may feel undeserving, Jesus loves us, has called us and saves us. He went out to where the undesirables of his world were, doing the unthinkable i.e. talking to social outcasts. Jesus told Matthew to follow Him – no pre-conditions, no test to pass, no tidying up of Matthew first to make him acceptable, just "follow me" – and Matthew did. He got up to follow Jesus, *not* to follow a set of conventions or an accepted way to live. Are we sometimes a bit like the Pharisees in v.11, thinking of our culture, our way of life as socially "healthy", whilst others are not? Are there people who for us are simply beyond the pale, who seem un-saveable? We have a new team (starting in a month's time) of Welcomers for the Sunday morning services. But what if our Welcome initiative starts attracting for example Hoodies? or openly gay people? or those with a criminal record? or those who augment their benefits with a bit of paid sex? or those with anti-social mental problems? We need to pray for God to change how we see people, to see them with Jesus' eyes.

A key aspect of being Good News for those not yet part of the Church is opening up the church building during the week. Some of us have been thinking about our ministry to parents. We have the nursery, SPOT and Little Notes but there's lots more we could do: firstly, perhaps, an Early-Bird Café/drop-in. The building at present is far from ideal but we can't wait until the *new* building is up and finished before we start. Jesus called all sorts and we need to be alert to those whom He is calling now, and make them welcome. Do talk to any of the leadership if you'd like to be involved.

But notice that the scene in our reading didn't actually take place at the temple or synagogue, it was out in the street. We are also challenged to do what Jesus did and *get out there* among those who do not yet believe. Jesus spent time with them, he sought them out – He had dinner at Matthew's house and talked with him and his friends, attracting other people to join Him. This was quality time, on their premises, and on their terms. Maybe we need to go to places where we wouldn't normally go, e.g. the pub, the betting shop. Or what about being at the Spirituality Fairs at the Dorking Halls? – that's where the spiritually hungry are to be found. Or what about being on the streets after pub closing on Fri or Sat nights? In many ways Dorking is a bit like Corinth, full of people from all kinds of backgrounds. Look at what St Paul said in **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**.

Look at **Matt 9:11-13**: don't worry about what other people might think, even if you are misunderstood at times. It may be that you are being called to go to places and be with people that others wouldn't approve of. Some may say we are changing things too much by attracting others in, or that we can't afford to spend time doing this, or the money that a bit of soft furniture and some decent coffee will need. But if we are convinced, on a personal level and as a church, that we are doing what Jesus would do, welcoming those outside into His Kingdom, then what others think isn't important. Look at v 13: Jesus commands each of us to work this out as a personal response, to listen to God and pray. Religious activity is not enough! We are to commend everyone to God, not to judge, not to make presumptions. To share Christ's love with those whom we meet, sprinkling our everyday conversations with God.



Witness: questions to discuss

Guidance: Before discussion read the Bible passage and ask God to help you discern what the Spirit wants to say to your group. Consider one or two questions below – don't feel you have to use them all! Make sure there's plenty of room for prayer and ministry.

1. **Ice-Breaker/Welcome:** What was the naughtiest thing you did as a child?
2. When did you last speak to someone new at church or at work? Who do you find the most difficult types of people to talk to or welcome at church and why? What can be done to help?
3. What quality time do we spend with those who are not Christians? What might God call us to do?
4. How can we be with someone who abuses others or acts in an immoral or criminal way, without seeming to condone their behaviour? Can you share any experiences about this? How might it affect us at work?
5. Looking at 1 Cor 9:19-23 and 2 Cor 5:16-19, how do you think St Paul coped with the pressures he faced?
6. What does Matt 9:13 mean for you personally?
7. What initiatives would you like to see at St Paul's that would use the building more during the week? Please feed back to your small-group pastor!