

11 June 2023, The 2nd Sunday of Pentecost: Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26 (Proper 6)

Today's Gospel begins in a casual way: *As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth...* (v 9). Commonplace details can lull us into thinking not much is happening. Yet in context of the entire Gospel, we will see profound truth. Jesus is *walking along*. This is how many episodes in the Gospels begin: Jesus on the move. There is a restlessness in Jesus; Through the centuries he has been described as an 'itinerant preacher,' going from place to place. It is assumed Jesus' rambling the countryside was to encounter as many people as possible. Such is a good, practical explanation.

Yet there is more. Jesus is the Divine Being of God incarnate in human flesh. God is never inert, never inactive, never lifeless. God is Life itself, in whom is all life and movement. Jesus' wanderlust, if you will, is essential. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote that God is pure act. In the Book of Wisdom we read, *Wisdom, while remaining within itself, renews all things...and produces friends of God, and prophets 7:26ff*). In the early Church Jesus was often referred to as God's incarnate Wisdom. Our forbearers recognized the dynamism of God's Life made real in Jesus' life.

Why is this important? Christians have a unique understanding of God's person, not just in Trinitarian terms—which is certainly unique—but also in our apprehension of God's "One-ness." We know God both is Transcendent—far above and beyond human comprehension and experience, and we know God is imminent, literally at our fingertips, closer than we are to ourselves. God is completely beyond us and intimately with us all at once. God does not remain tidily within Godself but bursts out in an ecstasy of love for all that God has made, coming to draw us back into Godself, to heal every wound, to restore, renew, resurrect. Hence, the two healing stories that follow—the bleeding woman, the raising of the dead child—are natural, revelatory actions of God-who-is-with-us.

As instructive as the healing stories are we will not get to them today. Think about another little detail: *As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth...* (v 9). As before, this is a mundane detail, and as before placing it in the context of the Gospels opens a wider truth. In about every case, Jesus sees before he acts. In the passage immediately preceding today's Gospel Jesus saw a paralyzed person on a stretcher, now he sees a man sitting at a tax booth. With the bleeding women and the dead child, he insisted on seeing them. Conversion begins by our being seen by Jesus, and Jesus sees us as we truly are, whatever our physical, emotional, and spiritual handicaps. Jesus sees our deepest concerns, longings, wounds, and miseries; he sees our desires, our dreams, our strivings, and triumphs. How could it possibly be otherwise: Jesus sees us before we see him. His gaze is not of judgment but of love-longing.

Whether from desperation, curiosity, surprise, or hope, if by grace we look to Jesus and meet his eyes we see, at least begin to see, the futility of self-sufficiency's delusion. We begin to see—usually haltingly, myopically, yet somehow it is enough—that we are loved to eternity by this God who is pursuing us, who is seeing us truly, and comes to us in mercy. So many of the spiritual masters of our Faith think this is conversion: not searching for God but being willing to be caught by God; not seeing God, figuring out, defining, categorizing God, but the willingness to stand before God in humility and be loved by God. Conversion means to give up, surrender—this takes a lifetime and more—to surrender to God our desperate dependencies on all that is not God, not consistent with God's love for ourselves and others.

A last mundane detail. Jesus saw Matthew *at the tax booth*. Ancient tax collectors were turncoats, greedy, crooks, and plenty more. Tax collectors lived in limbo—rejected by Jewish society, and never accepted in pagan society. Jesus called all sorts and conditions into his fellowship—from the powerful and wealthy like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, to middle class folk like Peter and Andrew, to those on the margins, even beyond the margins, like Matthew. This is why the Church is 'catholic,' a Latin word meaning 'universal.' Jesus pursues all people, sees all people, love-longs for all people. The question is not, 'what have you done before?' The questions are, 'do you see who sees you,' 'do you want to be loved into new life?'

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all morals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.