

Anglican Church Noosa
Contentious Jesus | Surprising | Luke 5: 27-32
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It was Billy Sunday who said,
“One reason sin flourishes is that it is treated like a cream puff when it is really a rattlesnake.”

Mark Twain said, *“We are all like the moon. We all have a dark side we don't want anyone else to see.”*

And Jesus says in today's Gospel reading from Luke, *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.”* And Jesus came to be that doctor, that physician for the soul.

Paul put it this way writing to Timothy, *“Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.”*

The amazing message of the Bible is that God chooses sinners to be his people. He chooses people who are obviously sinners, like Levi, later called Matthew. Levi was a dreaded tax collector who took more than his due.

But God chooses people who are less obvious sinners like Simon Peter. He was a respectable fisherman, we assume earning an honest day's wage for a hard night's work fishing. Yet as we learned two weeks ago, when he met Jesus he fell at Jesus's knees and said, *“I am a sinful man.”* So God chooses less obvious sinners like Simon Peter.

Jesus gives us a medical analogy – Just as it is only sick people who seek out a doctor so it is only those who realise they are sinners who seek out the Saviour.

Jesus teaching really cuts across popular understandings of God and ourselves. I think it would be fair to say the popular understanding is that

- God only chooses good people.
- Only good people go to church.
- Only good people go to heaven.

Jesus' teaching in Luke's Gospel turns the table on this kind of thinking. The very fact that Jesus chose Levi, shows this. Levi was not good. Tax collectors cheated people.

As well as taking the set amount of Roman tax they could set a commission for themselves, as much as they wanted. And they had the backing of the Roman sword for collecting it.

So the first reason they were not good people, is that they were cheats who were feathering their own nests, thank you very much.

Second reason is that they worked for the Roman overlords.

Rome was the occupying power so this was about collecting money for the invaders - the enemy. For the Jews, God alone was King and to pay money to Caesar, who claimed to be king, was sacrilege. And especially a king who took on God like status such as Caesar.

A third reason they're not good was a religious one. They broke the Law of Moses by associating with the pagan Romans. This meant they were defiled, unclean.

- Tax Collectors were barred from the Synagogue.
- They were not allowed to be witnesses in court.
- They were despised just as much as thieves or murderers.

The story of Matthew being called puts pay to the idea that heaven is only for good people. Jesus makes a place for Matthew.

I think we are meant to be surprised and amazed. Every other story we've looked at in this series in the past weeks has been amazing, so likewise this story.

It's amazing

- that Jesus should even be bothered with someone like Levi.
- That Levi should drop everything and follow Jesus. No one in their right mind would give up the lucrative career Levi was enjoying.
- It's amazing because we see once again Jesus authority. One simple command, and Levi obeys.
- And finally what is amazing is that Levi became Matthew, had his life was totally transformed and he ended up writing one of the Gospels.

Such a conversion is worth a party, and that is exactly what happens. Matthew gathers all his tax collector friends and other assorted sinners and throws a party.

Partying is important in the Kingdom of God and especially Luke's coverage of it. It is in Luke 15 we get the three parables-

- The lost sheep; when it is found, the shepherd calls his friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me I have found my lost sheep."
- The lost coin; when it is found, the woman called the friends and neighbours and says rejoice with me I found my lost coin. And ...
- The lost son, the father kills the fatted calf and throws a huge party when he comes home.

Only Luke has these stories.

And likewise with Levi, who throws his own party. In Luke's gospel it's described as a great banquet. Matthew and Mark's versions of this event simply have Jesus having dinner at Levis' house. But for Luke it's a great banquet. Luke understands just how great is the rejoicing when one sinner repents.

And of course who should Matthew invite to his banquet, but Jesus. Luke tells us that the party 'was for Jesus'. It sounds like Jesus was the honoured guest.

And who else was invited, tax collectors and sinners; Levis' mates. Levi did have friends, at least amongst his fellow extortionist tax collector mates, if not with the ordinary people.

Jesus appears to be quite comfortable mixing with these sinners. The Pharisees and teachers of the law appeared to be quite uncomfortable. They had lots of religious laws that were based on the premise, "bad company ruins good morals". They thought Jesus was seriously compromised by keeping such company.

And isn't Jesus masterly, the way he addresses their disdain by using this medical analogy. *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* And if he was going to call sinners he had to get close to them. And apart from that I think he just enjoyed a good party.

Luke's Gospel especially shows us Jesus getting close to sinners, and mixing with sinners.

- It is only Luke who has the story of the sinful woman who wipes Jesus feet with her tears, when he's dining at a Pharisee's house. Jesus reaches out to this poor woman and holds her up as an example of faith. Lk 7:36
- It is only Luke, as I've already mentioned, who has, in Luke 15, the three stories of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. These parables show God's great concern for people who've lost their way.
- And it's only Luke, in Ch 19, who has the story of Zacchaeus, another despised tax collector who Jesus reaches out to as well.

What an absolutely magnificent portrayal of Jesus we find in this beautiful gospel. The story of Levi being called by Jesus to follow him as his disciple, is consistent with the pattern of Jesus ministry throughout the whole Gospel.

Just this year I've had two people comment to me, quite independently, that lightning was going to strike them if they stepped inside a church. In other words they felt that they were so far away from God, or at least the Christian understanding of God that God would smote them if they dared to step inside a church. Sometimes the same idea is expressed when people say, "If I went to church the roof would fall in." Little do they know that there is already 60/100 sinners sitting under this roof every week and the roof hasn't collapsed yet.

Jesus was the friend of sinners. He welcomes sinners with open arms. He has welcomed you and me.

However, he doesn't do this because sin doesn't matter. His hearty welcome is matched by his call for a hearty repentance. And this is Luke's emphasis. In Matthew and Mark's version of this story, both of them simply say, *"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."* It's only Luke who adds, *"to repentance"*. *"I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."* And isn't that what is emphasised in those three stories of the lost sheep the lost coin and the lost son. Jesus says the message is this, *"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent."*

So does that mean there are some people who don't need to repent? Back in Luke 5 Jesus says I have not come to call the righteous. Are there some people for whom Jesus message is not needed because they are already righteous? Some people interpret these words literally and come to that conclusion.

To me it's obvious that Jesus has his tongue in cheek. Both here at the party with Levi, and in Luke 15 with those 3 parables, we are told Jesus is in the company of the Pharisees and Teachers of the law. This little piece of teaching is directed specifically at them, because they counted themselves as righteous and above other people and therefore not needing a Saviour like Jesus. You see, contentious Jesus is actually having a dig at them.

Another way of putting it is that Jesus has not come to call 'the righteous' because

- they will always be too blind to see their need of a Saviour.
- they will always be too proud to admit they are sinners who need a Saviour. Jesus is talking about the self-righteous. All of Jesus teaching is pointing in this direction.

The Pharisees missed it.

Sadly so many people today miss it.

And therefore they miss all that Jesus could give them. They miss the new birth and a new life in Christ. They miss the simple message of forgiveness and the joy it brings. They miss the party.

And these ideas are really prominent in the last section of the chapter. Jesus' disciples don't fast because they have the bridegroom with them, it is a time for feasting.

And as regards the garment v36, Jesus wants to give us a whole new life, not just patch up the old one. It's like putting on a new garment.

V37, 38 Jesus is like new wine that needs new wineskins. He makes everything new.

So this is the last week in our series "The Contentious Jesus" I hope you've enjoyed our time in Luke's Gospel looking at Jesus early ministry in Galilee. I hope you would agree that each week we have seen the contentious Jesus making all things new.

Week 1 really set the scene - Jesus reading Isaiah 61 in the Synagogue in Nazareth. Declaring that the Spirit of the Lord was on him, anointing him to proclaim good news and to set the oppressed free. He was basically saying he was the promised Messiah.

And then we've seen him proclaiming Good News, through his teaching in the synagogues and the open air.

He set the oppressed free, whether they were troubled by evil spirits or sick with all kinds of illness. He called people to follow him, respectable people like Peter the fisherman, and not so respectable people like Levi the tax collector. The only qualification for being called was a recognition of sin, and an acceptance of Jesus' forgiveness.

So in these two chapters of Luke we've seen Jesus the Messiah set so many people free, and he can set you free as well.

Let me pray.

Father we are staggered by Jesus ministry in Galilee. Thank you that he is the Messiah, and he has come to save us. Jesus, we recognise you as our Saviour. We hear your call on our lives. Show us what it means to follow you reaching out to the poor, the lonely, and the outcast, that all might find your salvation and be set free.

We ask in Jesus name. Amen