

Mission, Values and Vision

*⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.
(Ephesians 3:8-10. ESV)*

Message 3

Lost People Matter

February 2nd, 2014

Luke 5:27-32

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to Luke 5:27-32. As I mentioned last week we are in the midst of a 12 week series where we are looking at some of the important Scriptures that lie behind our sense of mission, value and vision as a church. Today we are going to be dealing with our second Core Value which reads as follows:

We deeply believe that lost people matter to God, and therefore, ought to matter to our church.

One of the texts from which that Value is derived would be the text that is open before you now. Luke in particular seems to have an interest in highlighting the sort of people that Jesus was gathering to himself. This passage, sometimes given the heading “The Calling of Levi” comes at the end of a series of stories where Jesus is seen gathering unusual people into his fledgling community. Earlier in the chapter he has called some fishermen to be his disciples and he has healed a leper and a paralyzed man now here, in this story he’s hanging out with tax collectors – the most hated group in all Israel! These men were seen as collaborators with the Romans, they were often fraudulent in their practices and they were as a class, among the least religious people in the land. They weren’t welcome in the synagogues and so they tended to just sit and stew in their sinfulness and yet here is Jesus, actively seeking them out. This is a strange story about a strange God who in his mercy seeks out sinners.

The story appears to have three sections, a call, a response and a caution. I'll read it to you, dividing it as we go and trying to bring to the surface those things Luke seems to be emphasizing in the text and then at the end we'll attempt to connect the dots from the teaching of this passage to the actual things we do here as a church. Here now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 27:

²⁷ After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me."

Here in this first verse and first section of the story we see the call of Jesus to Levi.

The Call

I want you to notice a couple of things. I want you to notice first of all that here, as elsewhere in the Bible, it is always God who initiates. Before we call on him, he calls on us. God's call us always first.

i. God's call is first

The text says **he went out** – **he saw** – in the context of the story those words mean something. Jesus is in Capernaum; it's a pretty small town and he has been teaching in the synagogue and he has been ministering out of Peter's house – the last story before this one is the one where people dig a hole in Peter's roof to lower down the paralytic so Jesus can heal him. Jesus has been INSIDE and then the text says that after this HE WENT OUT. He didn't go into the desert to pray, it says he went out and he SAW Levi. The word that Luke uses implies special interest in Levi, we might say he went out LOOKING for Levi.¹ Levi was a tax collector and so he would have been stationed down by the water at the point of entry for goods coming into the territory of Herod Antipas. This would not have been the first time Jesus saw Levi because we know that he is already closely associated with Peter and James and John who are fisherman living in Capernaum, meaning that everyday when Jesus came back to Peter's house after spending time at the lakeside or in the boat preaching he would have passed by Levi's booth. If Peter was

¹ See for example I. Howard Marshall in The Gospel of Luke NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1978), p. 219.

bringing any fish to market he would have to pay a tax to Levi, also called Matthew. Something attracted Jesus to Levi, but we don't know what. Maybe it was that Levi always seemed to be leaning in when Jesus was teaching from Peter's boat, maybe it was that Levi always stared at him when he and Peter passed by or maybe it was the look of pure hatred that Peter gave Levi every time he paid his taxes. Maybe it was the fact that when everyone else came to hear Jesus in the synagogue Levi stayed away. I don't know why but Jesus went looking for Levi!

Please hear that! Levi did not go looking for Jesus! The text doesn't say, "After the miracle with the paralytic at Peter's house, Levi knocked upon the door wishing to see Jesus" – no it says, after these things – when everyone IN TOWN was pressing forward for another miracle – Jesus WENT OUT LOOKING FOR LEVI! Are you hearing that? God is the great and determined seeker in the Bible. His call ALWAYS comes first. Jesus said to his disciples:

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you (John 15:16. ESV)

The call of God always comes first. Secondly we should notice that:

ii. God's call is particular

There must have been many people who were not clustered around Peter's house that day – I've been to Capernaum and I've seen what scholars say is the ruin of Peter's house and I've seen the narrow paths on either side, it does not appear that more than 150 people could be gathered in those tight confines – surely there were many people who were not there when Jesus WENT OUT – why then did he go looking for Levi? We don't know. We can never know why some are chosen are some are not – I'm not saying that there isn't a reason, I'm just saying that the Bible doesn't tell us the reason and it kind of discourages us from thinking too much about what those reasons might be. The Apostle Paul, Luke's mentor, put it this way:

¹³ As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

¹⁴ What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means!

¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

¹⁶ So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.

¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."

¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"

²⁰But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” (Romans 9:13-20. ESV)

There is a lot we don't know about the doctrine of election but here is what we do know and it is very, very sweet: God calls his children by name. He didn't go out looking for “people” that day, he went looking for Levi. What that means is that if you have been saved then you can know and rejoice in the fact that he knew you **BY NAME** from before the foundation of the world. When Jesus died on the cross he wasn't thinking of people in general and how nice it might be if any chose to believe in him one day – NO! He was thinking of you! Your name was before his face when he died. Your name is graven on his hands. He calls his children by name.

Thirdly, we must understand that:

iii. God's call is effective

Look what it does to Levi; Jesus seeks for him, sees him and calls him and then look at what Levi does:

²⁸ And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

That's what our grandparents called “effectual calling”. When Jesus calls – people come! I heard an old preacher say that there was a reason that when Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb he said: “Lazarus come forth!” because if he had just said: “Come forth” every person who had ever lived on planet earth would have risen from the dead in that moment. When Jesus calls, the dead come forth! That's just some of what Luke wants us to see about the marvellous call of God in this story.

The second section of the narrative deals with Levi's response and it sets out the nature of true conversion. Look at verses 28-29:

The Response

²⁸ And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

²⁹ And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.

The first we see in Levi's response to the Sovereign, particular and effectual call of God is that it resulted in:

i. A decisive break with sin

²⁸ And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.

That's an impressive statement. Luke uses some simple grammatical clues in the Greek to make this point. He uses the aorist participle for "leaving behind" which serves to indicate a decisive break. Aorists are often used for one time, decisive events in the past. In English we would say: "I spoke to Joe on the phone yesterday" – meaning it happened yesterday, I'm not still on the phone with Joe. It was a decisive event that happened in the past. Luke is saying that Levi made an immediate and DECISIVE break with the past. He left it all! He was no longer Levi the Tax Collector, Levi the Collaborator, Levi the Fraud – he was now and immediately Levi the disciple and follower of Jesus Christ. Do we still believe in that kind of change? Do we still believe that people can be born again? That lost people can be found and that blind people can be made to see and that sinners can be made to repent? I pray we do. At the end of the story Jesus says that it is this sort of miracle he has come to do:

³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinner to repentance."

Jesus, don't you know that is impossible? Don't you know about addiction Jesus? Don't you know that we were born this way Jesus? Don't you know that this sort of change is IMPOSSIBLE FOR PEOPLE apart from a miracle of God? It is impossible apart from a miracle of God but miracles happen to be the specialty of Jesus and he is particularly fond of the miracle of repentance. Luke obviously knew that because later when he wrote Acts he recorded Peter saying:

³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, **to give repentance to Israel** and forgiveness of sins. (Acts 5:31. ESV)

Later he records the whole church in Jerusalem rejoicing because this miracle has spread to the Gentiles:

¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also **God has granted repentance that leads to life.**” (Acts 11:18. ESV)

Repentance is a gift – it is a miracle but we see it everywhere as the authentic response to the Sovereign, particular and effectual call of God unto salvation.

Secondly, in Levi’s response we also notice:

ii. A progressive walk with Christ

²⁸ And leaving everything, **he rose and followed him.**

Luke moves from the aorist participle “leaving behind” to an imperfect indicative which is used to show on-going, sustained action. If the aorist can be illustrated by saying: “Yesterday I spoke to Joe on the phone” then the imperfect would be illustrated by saying: “When I was 12 months old I began to speak” – obviously that was not a one time thing; I started speaking and I haven’t stopped since! That is on-going and sustained action in my life; you above all people understand that. So Luke says here that when Jesus called Levi, he left it all behind, once and for all and he began to follow Jesus and he kept right on going. True conversion involves a decisive break with the past and a progressive and sustained walk with the Lord.

Thirdly we notice:

iii. A public profession and witness

²⁹ And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.

Immediately upon becoming a following of Jesus Christ, Levi went public. He threw a party and he invited his friends to meet the Saviour who came looking for him. Is that why Jesus went looking for Levi? Because he knew that Levi was the sort who would immediately reach out with the Gospel to others? Again I don't know, we can't know, but this I know: many times I have observed the election of an individual for the sake of an entire family or group. I have seen God powerfully and effectually call an unlikely individual and through that individual reach an entire family or group. I'm not saying that is the reason, I'm just saying, it is often the effect. A real Christian, a true convert goes public. If you love Jesus and if you are thankful for grace then you want to spread the news.

The third section contains a warning to those who visibly belong to the covenant community.

The Caution

³⁰ And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

³¹ And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:27-32. ESV)

I think there are two cautions in this paragraph, though perhaps you see more. The first one I see can be stated this way:

i. Beware the deceitfulness of your own heart – beware of false assurance!

The irony here is of course that the people who were sure they were in were in fact very far from the kingdom of God and the people they thought were too far to reach were actually entering ahead of them. Jesus gave this warning again and again.

"Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. (Matthew 21:31. ESV)

The Pharisees trusted in the wrong things – their good works – and they received as assurance the wrong things – their wealth. They thought that because they did good they must be saved and they thought that because they were rich, this was confirmation of God's favour and blessing

upon them. What they had forgotten is that often the things God gives to one generation as a blessing often become a curse upon their children and their grandchildren. The riches that may have been a blessing upon one generation become a curse in the next! Blinding the eyes of children and grandchildren to the grace and goodness of God and to their own weakness and need and barring them from the Gospel of grace. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven! How hard it is for the rich man to enter the kingdom of God! Sometimes religious people trust in the wrong things and sometimes rich people misread the nature of their blessing. Receive that as a warning; or as the Apostle Paul said:

⁵Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. (2 Corinthians 13:5. ESV)

Don't trust in the sincerity of your certainty – the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked – who can know it? You are expert at fooling you. So examine yourselves. I'd start with measuring yourself against the standard of Levi's response. Did you make a clean break? Have you ever miraculously turned your back on the past and walked away? Do you have a sustained and progressive walk? Are you becoming like Jesus by one degree of glory to the next? And do you have a public profession and testimony? Do people know to whom you belong or are you quiet and afraid? If the answer to any of those questions is no, you need to be concerned and you need to seek real and Biblical assurance.

The second caution might be stated this way:

ii. Remember to whom all people will have to answer

I think that caution comes to the surface when we read the text very carefully. Look at verses 30-31:

³⁰ And the Pharisees and their **scribes grumbled at his disciples**, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

³¹ And **Jesus answered them**, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

The Pharisees and their Scribes grumbled AT THE DISCIPLES. At this point this must mean Peter, James and John and maybe Andrew – other than Levi, Jesus doesn't have any other disciples yet. So here we have these baby Christians and their being attacked and criticized by

respected figures within the religious community – that must have been very intimidating. Jesus, seeing that, or overhearing or just somehow knowing, puts himself between them and their accusers and HE ANSWERS FOR THEM.

³¹ And **Jesus answered them**, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

Isn't that beautiful? I think there is a reminder in that for us. We are not responsible to answer to our critics. People in this town may think we are crazy, they may and sometimes do write nasty letters about us to the newspaper, they may ask you hard questions at your school or workplace about why we do this or do that and this passage seems to be saying: “You answer to Jesus, not to these people. And these people will answer to Jesus and so we all better just prepare to answer to Jesus.” All people, on the last day will have to stand before Jesus and give an account. Therefore, you just do what Jesus told you to do. Remember to whom you will answer.

Connecting The Dots From Value To Activity And Identity...

Now, in the few minutes we have left I want to very quickly connect some dots from our second Core Value, rooted in passages like this to some of the practical things we do as a church in pursuit of our mission. Understanding that lost people matter to God and seeing in texts like this one how it is that God in Christ has come to call sinners to repentance ought to explain:

1. Why we invest so heavily in outreach ministries here and around the world

Do you see? This is why we do reCOVER, this is why we do Family Circle, this is why we do Guardians of Hope in India, this is why we do camps in Manitoba because we serve a SEEKING GOD! He is seeking his sheep in Orillia, in India and in Manitoba among all the peoples of the world! Our God is a seeking God and he comes to seek and save the lost.

2. Why we invest in ordinary means without adopting mechanistic expectations

By that I mean that it just isn't as simple as running a program for single parents or for recovering alcoholics and then just throwing the Gospel out there and everyone comes to Jesus –

we have to remember that there were quite likely many tax collectors in that region but Jesus went looking for Levi! There were many sick people lying by the Pool of Bethesda but Jesus went looking for one man and told him to take up his mat and go. He didn't say anything to the many hundreds of other people who were just as sick and just as lost. He calls people by name and so we can't be so crude as to think that if we do it right everyone will get saved. We are going to do it right - as right as we can - because God's ordinary way is to use ordinary means but we celebrate every new life as a miracle of God and we never credit our methods, we always credit God's mercy.

Thirdly, this is:

3. Why we spend the better part of 5 months agonizing over our budget

I know it doesn't seem very sexy but understanding the budget, influencing the budget and approving the budget are among the most important things that you do as a member of this church. Think of our money as in large part the sum of our "talents" to borrow a Biblical phrase. Are we going to bury them in a cloth or send them out into the marketplace of human souls and gather a harvest and return for the Master? That's what the budget is about. How are we going to make disciples in Orillia and around the world? Are we going to remember God's concern for the lost and the lowly? And are we going to remember Luke's warning about the deceitfulness of our own heart? Are we going to audit the budget to make sure that it doesn't reflect our own creeping pride and sense of entitlement? Recent studies indicate that Evangelical churches now give only around 3-4% of their budget to missions; the rest is spent on themselves. Beautiful buildings, lavish programs, incredible environments! I remember hearing about a church that had slide tubes for the kids to enter Children's Ministry! Can you imagine how cool that would be? You sign your kid in and they hop into this tube thing and WOOSH! Down into Children's Ministry. That is cool! If that won't save people, nothing will! And you wonder, how much will that cost? And they tell you: \$30,000? And you think: "That's a bargain at twice the price!!" Its so easy to despise the lost and to feed the deceits of our own heart. We are by nature so lost. Thanks be to God for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who came to seek and save the lost, and who came to call sinners to repent.

Get a copy of the budget and run the numbers. You heard me say that I'm dreaming of 50/50 by 2050 – whether we do that or not is up to you. I don't have the power to pass a budget and neither does the board. The Board is in charge of making sure that the staff spend only what the budget allows them to spend but the congregation ultimately decides what the budget is. Run the numbers. You decide whether we despise the lost in this place. You decide whether we build slides and waterfalls and monuments to the idols of our hearts.

And lastly, this is:

4. Why we preach the Gospel to ourselves as much as to “outsiders”

We preach the Sovereignty of God, the deceitfulness of our hearts, the grace of God in Christ, the necessary response of worship, obedience and service and the sole end of God's glory in Christ over all things because WE NEED TO HEAR IT. Our hearts are deceitful above all things – MY HEART IS DECEITFUL ABOVE ALL THINGS. I can be a people pleaser and an ear tickler and I need to remember that I am a sinner saved by grace who will one day stand before Jesus and give an account; and you need to hear that too. Be careful; we who think we stand; lest we fall and fade away.

Let's pray together.