

## WELCOME 6<sup>th</sup> March 2022 – 1 Lent '22 C

Luke 5:27-32

**Welcome!** It's great to be together again... **Bible Study** Qs are provided to equip you so God can lead you into the fullness of His word & work in your life, then you can share that w/ someone else. We'll also use these for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-up on Friday**. While the restrictions are lifting... We're still doing things we need to maintain a level of safety: Hand sanitizer. Masks optional but encouraged inside. Communion. Thanks set-up & clean-up folks!

**As we move into this week...** "To Do" lists... Do you have one? **More** than 1?

**Personal**...family...work...LW...volunteer...Retired folks have more lists & more on them than ever...amirite? You'll quit when you die? Do you ever get 'em all done?

You want to see a "to do" list that's never finished? **"Follow me & be my disciple."** This side of eternity...if you say "yes" to this invitation, there's always someone to bless, someone to encourage, someone to serve, someone who needs to hear & see the life of Jesus made real right before their eyes. If you say "yes" to this invitation, there's always an opportunity to be generous, to listen, to correct error, to still someone's fear/anxious thoughts, to bear a burden, to ease pain or comfort grief...always something to learn...somewhere to grow...be changed...

But more than a **catalogue** of stuff needing your attention or a crush of deadlines & expectations w/ someone breathing down your neck to get it all done...If you say "yes" to **this** invitation, there's always an opportunity for you to have your hopes nurtured & your joy multiplied, to be forgiven, healed restored set free & re-directed toward a new better way...to receive joy in the face of sadness... blessing in a season of emptiness... **So** *Levi got up, left everything, & began following him. for the rest of his life into eternity*

Jesus invites you to accept his invitation...to allow His love life power Word to fill & direct your life so your heart is changed & your life shaped as we are entrusted w/ power & authority to invite others to join us on the way of Jesus...the journey w/ him.

The invitation is open... How will you respond to God's invitation?

Let's pray & then we'll see...

## PRAYER OF THE DAY:

*Lord God, heavenly Father, you know that we are set in the midst of so many challenges & seemingly great dangers. We become fearful & anxious & seek shelter instead of perseverance. We too often duck & cover instead of holding our heads high. Grant us your strength & your protection. Defend us from fear in danger & fatigue in our daily work. Equip us to stand triumphant over all temptations. At every step let our feet move in time to your stride & walk confidently in your way; according to the life you give through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord alive in us...Amen.*

Let's sing then we'll hear God's Word...

## **FAITH CHAT:**

1. What's the minimum standard requirement for following (being a disciple or apprentice) to Jesus? (based on what you just heard in the Gospel)
2. Why is that so important? What does that say about you?

## 1 LENT '22 C – RSVP: INVITATION TO THE JOURNEY

I've shared w/ some... I am in an interesting spiritual place at the moment... It's great! I'm not sure why... or toward what the Spirit is leading... but I'm finding the more I read the Bible the more it's the little things that take hold of my heart. A word or phrase or I'll be reading & suddenly seemingly disconnected parts of Scripture connect... & something starts making sense... And all I can do is share... So here goes...

A number of us are reading through the *F260 Bible Reading* plan Leonie introduced us to at the end of last year... I'm doing that & also reading through the NT like always. This week: Lk 17... Pharisees ask Jesus **"When will the Kingdom of God come?"** He explains it's not like they're expecting because **"Kingdom of God is already among you."** Part of me sees him saying that w/ a grin because they don't get it that **HE IS** what they're looking for & he's close enough to touch & they don't get it... but then he says the ΒτΘ & it's arrival **NOW** in their midst, **AND** in its fullness upon his return, demands **immediate attention** because it forces our lives into a forward-facing future-oriented way of life because we have his word on the fulfillment of all God's promises... in him everything God promises is fulfilled & that is true **NOW** for all who trust that Jesus is who he says he is & is doing all he says he is doing... **AND** we'll see it in complete fullness at the last day.

When someone is drawn to trust in Jesus by the working of God's Spirit it's a complete re-orientation of life... a complete re-direction of our hearts values attitudes beliefs hopes aspirations dreams decisions. Jesus says **Lk 17:32** – **"Remember Lot's wife!"** What happened to Lot's wife? **Gen 19**... Confronted by the angels of God & warned about the looming destruction of Sodom/Gomorrah she has to be dragged by the hand from the city & eventually lags behind her fleeing family & then looks back at all she's losing... all she has had to leave to stay alive → pillar of salt. She won't even be dragged into a new future. She refuses to let God lead her out of her broken past. She cannot release that which would gladly devour her, her husband, her daughters & their lives for the sake of God's promised protection & provision.

Suddenly the magnitude of this moment... **"Follow me & be my disciple,"** Jesus said to Levi. So Levi got up, left everything, & **began** following him. Jesus doesn't have to ask twice... **got up... left everything... & began** following. There is no suggestion Levi is going to do what others did... **let me go bury my father... let me go say goodbye to my family...** even his undeniable wealth & power as a tax collector doesn't slow him down for a moment... **got up... left everything... & began** following... no hesitation, no 2<sup>nd</sup> thoughts, no momentary <sup>cost/benefit</sup> analysis... **got up... left everything ... & began** following.

**"Remember Lot's wife!"** Yeah... I remember. This ain't her.

On one hand Levi had a life he knew: he called the shots & lived the 1%. He had Roman soldier/bodyguards so no robber/angry taxpayer could stick a knife in him. Hated by his fellow Jews, & used by Rome; but it was **HIS** life. *safe secure well fed*

On the other hand there's life w/ Jesus where Jesus calls the shots... Where there's no guarantee about tomorrow/day after: *"Foxes have holes, & birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."* Following Jesus means his job is gone. Following Jesus means he still doesn't get his place back among the Jews... He's always going to be seen as a traitor/collaborator. Jesus pulls the plug on predictability comfort ease. There's only one guarantee for followers of Jesus. **If you follow Jesus, what you get is Jesus.** Nothing else made Levi give up tax collecting. Not his parents' pleas, not his friends' urgings, not the public taunts/threats. Two words from Jesus change Levi inside/out: **"follow me."** That's enough to change His life. And it does. Instantly. Here's how that works...

Philippa alluded earlier to this tax-collector's name & maybe you wondered... Matthew or Levi? His parents would have named him Levi (good Jewish/Hebrew name) & some scholars believe he could easily have been of the priestly tribe & his mom/dad hoped he'd live into his name & become a priest. Why? The priests were God's go-betweens. The Levites were to be the human face of a loving God. They were meant to lead people under God's influence... to take the mercy grace & forgiveness of the Father & mediate-distribute it to the people & point people in the direction God was taking them in their lives.

But sin shreds the fabric of who we are... As a tax-collector, he became Rome's go-between & his Roman handler/supervisor would have re-named him Matthew. In this context he became the Jewish face of a tyrannical regime, bringing people under Rome's influence. Sin made him the opposite of who he was meant to be. Which is precisely what sin does... turns us from being responsive to God & responding to our neighbour to captive to our own desires... turned in on self.

Two words from Jesus change Levi instantly from inside/out so he can be who he was supposed to be all along: **Later,** Levi held a banquet in his home w/ Jesus as the guest of honour. Many of Levi's fellow tax collectors & **other guests** also ate w/ them. **"Other guests"** In other words every tax collector, bookie, bartender, bouncer, lady of the evening & con artist in town... That's the only friends a tax collector has... other scumbags & scoundrels no one else will have anything to do w/ in public. Now Levi is doing what he was born to do. Now he's a go-between, drawing people under the influence of Jesus... bringing people into the orbit/gravitational pull of Jesus. Levi becomes who he's meant to be, **ONLY** when he follows Jesus... **got up... left everything... began following**

Of course the perpetual kill-joys show up & throw mud all over the place, but: Jesus knows: **"Healthy** people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners & need to repent." There's only 2 kind of people in the world...sinners who know it & sinners who won't admit it. There's the sick who are hunting for a Dr & the sick who are pretending to be ok. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> kind...Jesus has nothing...Scripture makes it clear & Jesus nails it: no-one is *actually* righteous. There are only sinners drawing breath on this earth. But tragically, a whole bunch of folks spend their whole lives faking it. If that's you...you get to keep your sickness & your fakery for all eternity...& that's called hell.

But for sinners who know it...the sick hunting for healing... Repentance is allowing our lives to be gathered away from danger/death into the protective saving presence & power of Jesus. Not a fear-driven cowering beneath the raised fist of God, but being gathered alongside the One who will give his life so we can live forever. Repentance is about being drawn from danger to rescue...from alone to community...from certain dust to life in God's kingdom...being drawn away from death; out of the direction of self-over-all-things & deeper into the power authority influence protection & provision of Jesus.

And that never ends...repentance is the journey...Luther said it like this...**"When** our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' he willed the entire life of a believer to be one of repentance" not just a personal struggle w/ sin which we normally equate w/ bad behaviour thoughts words deeds...but about daily surrender to the Father who loves us enough to offer His One & Only Son as redeemer rescuer restorer & send his Spirit to live from w/in to w/out. **"It** is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me & the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me & gave himself for me." – Gal 2:20 We are who we are meant to be only in Christ

**"Follow** me & be my disciple." If you say "yes" to **this** invitation, there's always an opportunity for you to have your hopes nurtured & your joy multiplied, to be forgiven, healed restored set free & re-directed toward a new better way...to receive joy in the face of sadness... blessing in a season of emptiness... If you say "yes" to **this** invitation, there's always someone to bless, someone to encourage, someone to serve, someone who needs to hear & see the life of Jesus made real right before their eyes...invited under the influence & gravitational pull of Jesus. If you say "yes" to this invitation, there's always an opportunity to be generous, to listen, to correct error, to still someone's fear/anxious thoughts, to bear a burden, to ease pain or comfort grief...always something to learn...somewhere to grow...be changed... always something to leave behind without looking back...

### **TAKE IT HOME:**

So Levi got up, left everything, & began following him.

What about you...?

What do you need to leave behind without looking back so you can follow like Levi?

What part of the journey needs to be renewed restarted in your life...?

Let's pray...

O merciful Jesus...Strong winds rage & it seems hard to keep going. Be our strength & our fortitude. Free us from the lie "I can't." In you all things are possible. In you no weapon formed against us will succeed. Fill us from the spiritual storehouse of heaven so no need is unmet.

Lead us beyond *what was* into your *will be* and as you live in us let your life be manifest to the world around us. In your name Lord Jesus...Amen.