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CD 711 Advanced Com - Spring 2020
Sermon Manuscript - 15 minutes - Due March 3
Matthew 9:9-13 - Jesus Meets People Where They Are, Do I do the same?

So, I have this amazing, artsy, Jesus loving, caring friend, her name is Lauren. Lauren and I went out to dinner last weekend to this incredible middle eastern restaurant in Montclair and talked and laughed and prayed together for hours. The thing is, when I think back to meeting Lauren, we almost didn't become friends, let me tell you why. Growing up you hear not to hang out with people who smoke or have tattoos and piercings because they will be a bad influence, or if you're a little older you've may have heard the old adage, "don't smoke, don't chew, and don't go with girls who do." When I met Lauren a few years ago, I didn't notice her cool hair and sweet fun-loving voice first, the first thing I noticed was that she smelled of cigarette smoke. I never really was around smokers, so you can probably guess what I did... I judged, and judged hard and wasn't really kind to her... for no other reason than she was a smoker. My best friend Emily, was Lauren's friend and I remember saying to her in a pretty judgey tone... why do you hang out with this girl who smokes?

You see, what I didn't know about Lauren was that she had just come out of 2 years of Teen Challenge. If you know what Teen Challenge is, it's a Christ-centered rehab home. She was 22 and had struggled with so much drug addiction and self-destructive behavior. As I listened to Emily tell me the story of Lauren, my heart broke and I sobbed, not for Lauren, but for my own awful, jerky, judgemental attitude. I was so convicted... and I called myself a Christian. I certainly didn't act Christ-like. She had been through so much, experienced the love of Jesus, got free from the bondage of drug addiction, and here I was being kind of a jerk in judging her for smoking cigarettes. I didn't take time to get to know her, to get to know her story, to enter into her world.

Clearly, I'm not a good example, so let's dig into the gospels to see how Jesus may have handled this differently than me... let's pray first...

Turn with me to the gospel of Matthew, chapter 9. In this passage the gospel writer starts with Jesus calling Matthew to follow Him. Let's look at Matthew, chapter 9, verse 9.

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Let's break this down, there's no mention of Jesus and Matthew meeting before this or that they

knew each other, so Jesus calls Matthew, which first of all was pretty crazy for a “religious leader” to do so. Matthew wasn’t a fisherman a noble profession, Matthew was a tax collector, someone in a profession that is known for being dishonest, because he kinda has to be in order to make a living. Jesus knew all this and called him anyway. Matthew didn’t ask to follow Jesus, he doesn’t first repent and ask forgiveness. Jesus calls him anyways. And you know what, Matthew got up and followed! He left his lucrative career, and followed the man who called him into belonging.

Verse 10 - “While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples.” Well that makes sense, What happens when we meet Jesus, many of us want to tell all of our friends the joy that we found, so Matthew opened up his home and he threw a party, or as the gospel of Luke calls, it a feast! And who would be the obvious guest list for a newly converted tax collector? Other tax collectors! And “sinners”, which could mean anything, but since this gospel was written to Jews, sinners most likely refers to non-observant Jews, those who don’t keep the rituals or dietary restrictions.

Verse 11 - “When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher (or Master) eat with tax collectors and sinners?” So, likely the Pharisees weren’t invited to the party,, but the homes there were more open, so more than likely, they were walking through the town to see what this intriguing prophet Jesus guy was doing, being a little nosy.

Let’s continue for Jesus’ response, Verses 12 and 13 - “On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Jesus is quoting Hosea 6 when he says, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice”. If you took Dr. Widbin’s Hebrew classes, you may know that the word “Mercy” in Hebrew is, “chesed”, and so very hard to translate in English. “chesed” encompasses, not only love and kindness, but benevolence and compassion... so many qualities of God that He desires for us to live out in our own lives as a result of a covenant or in this case a relationship that we freely enter into. What Jesus is saying to the Pharisees is that they are to show “chesed” toward these outcasts rather than judgement or condescending arrogance.

This may have been what I needed to hear when I first met my friend Lauren. I didn’t show her “chesed”. I said the exact same things about her that the pharisees said about Matthew. Ouch. So, I guess I pose the question to you, who is the “Lauren” in your life, the friendship, the relationship that you may be missing out on because of your attitude? Maybe you’re not like me, maybe it’s easier for you as it’s come for me, to love people who are outcasts, but how are you at loving religious people who are arrogant, Christian people who mean well, but are caught up in the rules and fundamentalism?

Take note, Jesus quoted Hosea for a reason, he was speaking their language too. Jesus crossed so many boundaries and knocked down so many walls, He intentionally chose to both celebrate with the sinners and still speak the language of the righteous to reach both groups

exactly where they were on their journey of faith.

Let us follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ, he stepped down from heaven, to inhabit our earth, to learn our culture, to befriend people that he didn't agree with or have any of the same views as all in the name of love.

I can tell you that this is hard. Has anyone ever been on a missions trip to another country? Or maybe the US is your missions trip. Lots of times you go through culture sensitivity training. We choose to intentionally learn the culture of people who are different than us but what about here? Do we do the same thing? All around me, there are opportunities for me to interact with those not like me, to meet people where they are, to love like Jesus loves.

But do I do it? Do I leave the comfort of my comfort zone, and step into a new context, a new environment, a new group of people... I do now. Well, I have gotten a little bit better. I can honestly say that I now have friends whose 1st language is different than mine, whose culture is different than mine, whose season of life is different than mine.. If I can be vulnerable, here are the harder ones that I'm still working on... those who have different struggles than mine, different lifestyles than mine, a different moral code... or here's a divisive one, even in Christian circles, how about having close friends with polar opposite political values. Does that one hit close to home for some people?

The people that Jesus sat down with for that meal were looking for the same thing that every kid on the first day of school looks for, they were looking for friendship and belonging. Jesus went to them, in their context, in their environment, in their comfort just like Jesus did for us. Jesus left all the comfort of heaven to come down to this earth just so that we can find belonging in His family. We each have a choice.

There's this song by Big Daddy Weave that has this one line that often pops into my head. "Of the Kindness of Jesus that draws me in, oh to tell of my story is to tell of Him."

I'm sure if you close your eyes for a minute you can think of someone that needs to know the love of Christ, someone yearning for friendship and belonging, someone yearning for the more that only God can give. Maybe this person has been on your mind since I told my story about Lauren.

Let's follow Jesus's example, maybe invite them for a meal and see where the conversation goes. Let the Lord lead. Trust God. Know that it's going to be awkward at first, but the more you do it, the easier it gets. What would you tell a kindergartener or a middle schooler on their first day of school... be nice to the kids, make new friends, ask someone who is alone to sit with you at lunch. Maybe we need to follow our own advice on that. Jesus met people where they were, we get to choose to do the same. Let's pray.