

Matthew 9:9-13

⁹As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. ¹⁰And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹²But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

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As we have entered the season of Lent there is a Service for Holy Communion Liturgy in the Methodist Worship book specifically for the season. It includes this invitation to receive of the elements;-

"Come to this sacred table, not because you must but because you may; come, not to declare that you are righteous, but that you desire to be true disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ: come, not because you are strong, but because you are weak; not because you have any claim on heaven's rewards, but because in your frailty and sin you stand in constant need of heaven's mercy and help."

It is an invitation I like as it reminds us all that in ourselves we have no strength or right of access, our access to God's grace is through God's grace. We all stand in constant need of mercy and help however long we have been followers, disciples, of Jesus,

"The Church is a hospital for sinners not a museum for saints," is a phrase which has been used for a number of years. Some would agree with it others may not, or will mean slightly different things by it.

Yet at the heart is the truth that the Church is people seeking to follow Jesus who have recognized our need of forgiveness and seek to grow more like Jesus. It is not that sin is illness but sin damages the individual who sins and often those around, forgiveness and healing is needed.

Jesus was comfortable in the company of those whom the respectable would seek to avoid. Sinners and tax collectors were seen as those who, by their behaviour, were stopping the coming of the Messiah. Yet here was the Messiah, unrecognised by the religious people, spending time with these very people to demonstrate the Kingdom of God.

The Pharisees were all for offering sacrifices and keeping the rigidity of the law as they saw it but they were not inclined to show mercy as the prophet Hosea revealed "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6)

Within the life of the Church we are called to be people of mercy whilst holy in our living. It was the way of Christ and is to be the way of his followers. The people of Christ are healed by grace and mercy. Let us not be overzealous in legalism, but allow God to judge whom he judges in his time and his way, with the mercy he has shown to each of us who seek to follow, as Matthew did, leaving our old ways behind.