



Join | Walk | Read | Pray | Commit

The Jesus Manifesto | Week 2 | Isaiah 61:1b-2 | Mark 2:13-17

Collect

Some icebreaker questions:

- What is the most meaningful gift someone has ever given you (however big or small)?
- What is one of the most useful skills you have ever learnt?

Context

In Mark's gospel, the character of Jesus' teaching is itinerant: the gospel is not only spoken, but something that is lived out — it is an *incarnation* just as the life of Jesus is the incarnation of the God of Israel.

Jesus not only teaches but he also calls people to follow - often those you would least expect. Our passage from Mark involves tax collectors, a profession hated by their contemporary society. They would be seen as 'moles', working on behalf of the occupying Roman regime.

Their presence was a reminder of the state of the nation, and their work would keep them constantly outside the accepted religious standards of the day. It has even been suggested that Jesus' association with tax collectors would be worse than with lepers, since physical ailments are not something chosen by those affected, whereas their profession was. The 'sinners' that Jesus has dinner with are not people of occasional transgression from the Jewish law.

Dining with Levi, other tax collectors and 'sinners' meant that Jesus was breaking Jewish dietary laws in a very overt manner. The intimacy of this meal is hinted at in the word used for 'dining' or 'having dinner', which can also be translated 'as he reclined at a table'.

The tension of this passage is set up between the teachers of the law and the tax collectors and 'sinners', where Jesus demonstrates that fellowship with Jesus is based on entirely different standards from the Jewish law. Study of the law makes one deserving, whereas Jesus calls and enters into intimate fellowship with the underserving and unrighteous.

The scandal of this story is that Jesus does not make repentance a precondition for his love and acceptance in this story, which is why the religious leaders hated and opposed him. This is not to say that repentance was not unimportant to Jesus, but simply that his love and presence to this hated group of people was pure gift — he saw value in them. This means that if they choose to repent, like Zacchaeus, they did so not in order to gain Jesus' favour, but because they had been loved as they were. Jesus is scandalously free with his love.

Content

Jesus attracts a crowd of followers, but the one we are told that he notices is a tax collector, who, on invitation, becomes a follower of Jesus. Jesus even ends up having dinner at Levi's house with all sorts of other religiously untouchable people.



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Depending who you were in the story, Jesus was either doing something right, or doing something incredibly wrong to attract these followers: the religiously unclean, and untouchables.

Discuss: How do Jesus' actions in this portion of Mark 2 reflect the calling on the servant of Isaiah 61:1b-2? Do you think it might have been a surprise to those anticipating the Messiah (the anointed one)?

Isaiah talks about proclamation of good news to the poor. In what way does Jesus proclaim good news in this section? What relationship do gospel words and actions have?

This section of Isaiah reveals that false prophets will be revealed by their use of power for self-gain. Jesus shows his fulfilment of the calling of the servant by using his power to empower those without any.

Discuss: As we are given the Spirit of the Lord, we must decide what to do with that power. Following the pattern of Jesus' interactions in Mark, what ways might you take the challenge to empower the least and the lost?

It seems that mixing with social outcasts got Jesus into trouble with the religious authorities. Jesus' welcome was radical. Not only did he invite Levi to follow him, but Jesus went to Levi's house for dinner.

Reflect: Honestly, what do you find hardest about the call to follow Jesus in this way of welcoming the social misfits or outcasts? Pause in the quiet to bring this to God, asking for wisdom, courage and skills.

Challenge

We see here that Jesus speaks truth, but his love comes with no strings attached. What sort of regular prayer and relational commitment do you have for someone that seems like a religious outcast, someone that might make church feel uncomfortable to welcome?

Jesus came for those in need, yet it's 'sinners' that, in a way, stand closer to God than those who think of themselves as righteous, because 'sinners' are far more aware of their need for God's grace. We reflected last session about the place of sharing our brokenness as an act of good news around us. How have you managed to implement that this last week?

Connect

Jesus is the doctor, we learn, and is able to do what no one else can. The hope we have to offer the world is entirely in him.

Share a story, if you have one, where you or someone else felt broken or vulnerable, and how the gift of Jesus was good news in that situation.

Share with one another one area you feel challenged to grow in from this study.

Pray: Give thanks for the people of those shared stories; ask for God's Spirit to move in the lives of those we know in need; ask for boldness to take on the challenges that we have recognised and shared.