

Wednesday 21 September 2016 St Peter's 10am

The Feast of St Matthew, Apostle, Evangelist

**Matthew the Tax Gatherer**

“Almighty God, may the transforming power of your Gospel be at work in us today - as we hear and respond to your word to us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.”

Over the last few years the people in my household, have spent many hours applying for jobs, with varying degrees of success. Hence I was interested when I found the following memorandum which is headed:

**Qualifications for Disciples**

Memorandum

TO: Jesus, Son of Joseph

Woodcrafter Carpenter Shop

Nazareth

FROM: Jordan Management Consultants

Jerusalem

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for management positions in your new organization.

All of them have now taken our battery of tests; we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education, and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale.

We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau.

James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely yours,

Jordan Management Consultants.

Today we honour Saint Matthew, disciple and apostle. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Matthew was a tax-gatherer when Jesus called him. Mark's and Luke's gospels agree, but give the tax gatherer's name as Levi. He's probably one and the same person since the three versions of today's encounter are almost identical.

In first century Judea, tax collectors were viewed as collaborators who extorted money from their own people in order to support the Roman occupation and enrich themselves by collecting Roman taxes.

There were several Roman taxes: a ground tax on which a Jewish farmer paid 10% of his grain and 20% of his fruit to the Romans;

an income tax of 1%; a poll tax just for living; a travel tax to travel on Roman roads; an animal tax to take your animal on the Roman roads, etc., etc. Tax collectors would always take a large commission, making themselves the richest people in town. Not surprisingly they were universally hated and notoriously dishonest.

Matthew would have been an outcast in his own town, so contaminated by his job that he couldn't even attend the synagogue because he was considered unclean by the Jewish law.

In Luke 18:11 we read "The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men-robbers, evildoers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector.'" In other words, tax collectors were in the same category as robbers and adulterers.

The fact that Jesus associated with men like Matthew, and even called him into his circle of disciples, was one of the things that scandalized his fellow Jews the most.

The Matthew/Levi we meet in the gospels is traditionally believed to be the author of the first Gospel in the New Testament.

As a tax collector, he would know how to write, unlike the fishermen who were Jesus' disciples.

Yet, with such a background it seems ironic that the Gospel according to Matthew is considered the *most Jewish* of the four Gospels. It takes the greatest care in showing that Jesus was faithful to his Jewish heritage and it frequently quotes Old Testament texts to prove that he came, not to abolish the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them.

His Gospel is also the work of a skilful writer who not only wrote well but also knew how to organize his materials to their best advantage.

These qualities have made it, down through the centuries, the favourite version for many of the preachers, teachers, and reading public of the Church, particularly at Christmas and Easter services.

Jesus was walking along when he called to Matthew: "Follow me".

It was a very public moment but immediately Matthew went and that evening he hosted a great feast for Jesus and the disciples.

However we also read that:

*"Many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him".*

So where did they come from? Presumably they were invited by Matthew. He must have gone out to other tax collectors he knew and told them about Jesus and invited them to his own home for a meal to see and hear for themselves who this Jesus was. It reminds us of the story of the “Samaritan woman at the well” and her invitation for her friends to come and see Jesus.

In other words, this is an "evangelist" story.

A few weeks ago in her charge to Synod Bishop Victoria said; and I quote: *“Our challenge this year is to make disciples who make disciples. Let me conclude my charge on the theme of Christian discipleship. (The Second letter of) Timothy chapter 2. Vs 2 tells us that we are to make disciples who make disciples. For years many of our churches have been looking for a quick fix which will fill the pews and increase giving. But programmes are not the answer. We need to develop a discipleship culture across this Diocese so that every part of our lives come under the Lordship of Christ, and every new mission and ministry initiative seeks the leading of the Holy Spirit. Discipleship is the air we breathe and the ground on which we walk.*

*Discipleship and transformed lives, seeking to assist other lives to be transformed by Jesus, is the calling of, and necessary culture of, this diocese as it seeks to serve the priorities of Young Leaders; Faithful Stewardship and Christ centred Mission.”*

When Jesus invited Matthew to follow him and become a disciple Matthew responded immediately. But he didn't just follow Jesus, he also called others to do likewise – to come and meet Jesus and join with him at a banquet where all were accepted as honoured guests.

Today we are still called to come to Christ's banquet inviting whoever will come to join with us. Amen

