

Gospel Enquiry – Calling of a Disciple

As Jesus was walking on from there he saw a man named Matthew sitting by the customs house, and he said to him, 'Follow me'. And he got up and followed him.

While he was at dinner in the house it happened that a number of tax collectors and sinners came to sit at the table of Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?' When he heard this he replied, 'It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick. Go and learn the meaning of the words: What I want is mercy, not sacrifice. And indeed I did not come to call the virtuous, but sinners.'

Matthew 9:9-13



Commentary:

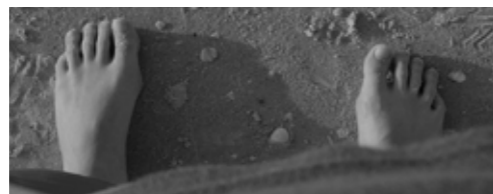
Here we have firstly, an example of a 'call narrative'. Jesus invites Matthew, known in Mark and Luke's Gospels as Levi, to 'follow him'. Jesus is unique in the way he gathered his disciples. Whereas the Jewish custom was that a disciple would choose his own teacher, Jesus himself took the initiative to call people to follow him. A disciple is understood as a learner, a pupil of a certain teacher, one who submits him or herself to a discipline of learning. In the context of Jesus' times, it was a regular aspect of Jewish life that a teacher – or Rabbi – would share and discuss the interpretation of the Mosaic law (Torah) with a group of interested people – disciples – who with guidance and extensive training, might themselves expect to become Rabbis in their own right. Thus, a disciple, might eventually him or herself share their own ideas with disciples of their own.

Jesus expected something different of his disciples. The emphasis of discipleship in the eyes of Jesus is on a personal commitment and loyalty to him, rather than what was to be studied. The emphasis is on a personal commitment to believe in Jesus. This is a radically new approach to discipleship, which required commitment to an individual and implied obedience, service and even suffering in his name.

What is also unique about Jesus' disciples is that he chose them from a wide range of experience and background, from fishermen, tax collectors and Zealots (political agitators). Jesus asserts that his message is not meant to be restricted to a small elite group of people. It was for all – the devout Jew, the pagan, and the sinner. Christian discipleship is relevant to all human beings, irrespective of race, gender, nationality or social class. In spite of our individual weaknesses, no one is excluded. Discipleship itself is not defined by birth, status or academic qualifications. Anyone is qualified to be a disciple.

Thus the choice of Matthew, the tax collector. He was a social outcast, a collaborator with the hated Roman occupiers, and corrupt to boot, creaming off access for his own profit. Yet Jesus chose him personally. And in the second part of the Gospel passage we are told why. Jesus challenged the prejudice and religious intolerance of his day. To be a 'sinner' meant to be a social outcast, made 'unclean' by breaking religious laws or following a disreputable profession. To associate with these people, cast out from the norms of social and religious life, meant to be tarred with the same brush. Jesus had no time for this. He quotes the prophet Hosea (6:6) reminding the Pharisees that at the real heart of the Jewish Law and its interpretation should be forgiveness and mercy.

FOLLOW



ME

Questions for enquiry:

- Why do you think Jesus chose Matthew as a disciple, especially knowing what he did for a living?
- Why do you think the Pharisees were so critical of Jesus' company?
- What qualities do you think you need to be a disciple within the YCW?
- How do the young people you know feel about the way religious organisations think of them? Do they feel accepted and welcomed? Why/why not?
- How can you as a YCW be welcoming to others?

Accompanier

For adults who accompany YCW & Impact

The promise of growth

What do short extracts from the Gospels have to say to teenagers about what they are going through, their sensitivities, their concerns? How are they a resource for accompaniers? How can these stories help us to find a new way of accompanying? Are they food for everyone?

Let's focus particularly on the parable of the mustard seed in Matthew's Gospel (Mt 13:31-2):

He put another parable before them: 'The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the biggest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air can come and shelter in its branches.'

Parable

These gospel texts which we call parables use a language of images. The biblical writers often call on images and comparisons to offer another approach to reality. In the form of simple, easy to understand stories, the parables take their imagery from ordinary life, and go beyond a simple comparison. They have a teaching in themselves, an 'explanatory streak', says the Jewish proverb. Like every rabbi, Jesus loved telling parables.

Parable of the Kingdom

When we read the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) carefully, we see that Jesus told his stories with a precise audience in mind. Jesus deals carefully with the things of everyday life, a reality which remains hidden, because it's difficult to describe. **'The kingdom of Heaven is like...'**

'... a grain of mustard that a man took and sowed in his field'. Starting from daily life, Jesus transports his

listeners into the kingdom of God. We are plunged into the very mystery of God's action and his presence among humanity. In the parables, Jesus leads his audience, and us, to enter into the relationship which he begins with them/us. They invite them/us to discover the mystery of his working in human hearts. Through his teaching in parables, Jesus shifts the perception of his contemporaries, who were expecting another kind of kingdom, one which would liberate them from the Roman authorities. Hearing this way of speaking was a shock for them.

Small beginning, great promise

At first sight, the distance between the grain of mustard and the kingdom of Heaven seems huge. Looking more closely, and also at the parable of the yeast (Mt. 13:33), which immediately follows the parable of the mustard seed, we see the key to understanding: these two things from daily life, yeast and mustard, are tiny, yet symbolise the kingdom of Heaven. The mention of them goes straight to the heart of the crowds Jesus is addressing: he is talking about their own life experience and concerns. The good news which these parables offer confirms the existence of the kingdom of God. Here, attention is drawn to the small beginnings: the Kingdom will come from these small beginnings, which draw on everyday life, 'the smallest of all the seeds'. But it will develop into a great tree, like the huge amount of dough which comes from a little yeast. Jesus communicates to his audience that there is no doubt that, from small beginnings, God will bring the fullness of his reign and of his life among humanity to completion. It is he himself, Jesus, who, through the whole of his life (words, actions, death and Resurrection) will confirm God's promise to us.

Pitfalls to avoid

To understand the Kingdom as something developing in the way that the things of this world grow and develop would be to fall into a trap, as would seeing this parable as an image of action to be taken when working with teenagers. The coming of the Kingdom does not depend on our mission efforts. Another parable (Mk 4:26-29) emphasises that the grain grows by itself, that is, that the Kingdom has within it what it needs for growth.

We need to re-read to serve others. The accompanier who wants to get this will try to take these points together: living alongside the teenagers s/he works with, the reality of their small beginnings, the promise of growth which comes through Jesus himself. Re-reading the experience of the relationships teenagers live is to look at those little beginnings, in ourselves as well as in them. Asking who we are and what we are becoming, letting ourselves be grabbed by the YCW's teaching methods, allowing ourselves to be touched by biblical texts, and being familiar with the coming of Jesus' Kingdom, which has many faces. 'In my Father's house there are many places to live in' (Jn 14:2).

It is by cultivating an attitude of goodwill towards those whom we accompany, opening up the possibility of a quest which helps each person's own search for the truth, rooted in ordinary life, that we will be able to serve that hope of a Kingdom which is both already here and which is to come.

(Adapted from an article by Yannick Voisin, JOC France)

Accompanier - For adults who accompany YCW & Impact
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YCW
The Difference
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Matthew's Insights on the Person of Jesus

Advent: A New Year for the Church

Advent 2007 will see us begin another liturgical year in the Church's calendar. In order that we hear the majority of all four Gospels within our Sunday Eucharists, the Catholic Church organises the proclamation of the Gospels into a three-year cycle, years A to C. This Advent we begin Year A once again, which means that we will be listening for the most part to the Gospel according to Matthew throughout the coming year. Therefore this brief article aims to highlight a few pointers in how to understand Matthew's Gospel and his picture of the person of Jesus. This will not only help us personally, but also in accompanying our YCW members, especially in regard to Gospel Enquiries.

Matthew's Gospel

Traditionally Matthew's Gospel is attributed to one of the 12 Apostles of Jesus, Matthew or Levi, who it is recounted, was a tax collector. Whether it was personally Matthew who composed this Gospel, or people who knew Matthew and the Christian community he formed in Antioch, we do not know for certain. Whoever was the author, they had a particular audience to whom they were writing. They were presenting the person of Jesus to Jews or Christian converts from Judaism at a time when the distinction between Judaism and Christianity was

becoming sharply, and sometimes pointedly defined. The Gospel often portrays Jesus at constant loggerheads with the scribes and Pharisees, the religious representatives of the Jewish community. This probably reflects the growing tensions between Jews and Christians within Antioch at the time of the Gospel's composition. Scripture scholars date Matthew's Gospel to probably 80 CE, some 10 years after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in Jerusalem, and some 40 years after the death and Resurrection of Jesus.

“He is the messiah, the new Moses, the one in whom everything is fulfilled”

Matthew's Take on Jesus

Due to the surrounding circumstances of the composition of this Gospel, and the audience to whom it is being addressed, the author(s) were keen to portray Jesus as the 'Jew' par excellence. More than this, Matthew wanted to portray Jesus as the perfect fulfilment of Jewish history as recounted in the Old Testament. It is the most Semitic of the Gospels, constantly touching on Jewish and rabbinic customs and ways of thought and argument, stressing that Jesus is truly the Messiah promised by the prophets. The main part of the Gospel, apart from the infancy stories and the passion narrative, is divided into five sections (each with a narrative

and a teaching section) linking in high symbolism to the five books that make up the Torah or Jewish Law. Matthew assembles Jesus' teaching into five great discourses, each with its own subject: the Sermon on the Mount (5–7), the Missionary Discourse (10–11), Parables (13), the Community (18) and the Last Discourse (24–25). So the author shows that Jesus is not only the Messiah but also the Lawgiver or second Moses, who completes, fulfils and surpasses the Torah. For example, Matthew presents Jesus teaching the crowds in the Sermon on the Mount, a direct comparison and reference to Moses, who received the Ten Commandments, the heart of the Law, on Mount Sinai.

Interpreting Matthew's Gospel

Due to the fact that Matthew's Gospel was written in a time of great tension between Jews and Christians, often, and highly ironically, Matthew's Gospel has been interpreted by Christians in a way that has fuelled and inspired Anti-Semitism. As seen, this is to the contrary of Matthew's intentions. He was proud of his Jewish roots and tradition and wanted to portray Jesus in the same light. Jesus is presented as the summit of God's revelation to the Jewish people, and through the 'Chosen People' to the world. He is the Messiah, the new Moses, the one in whom everything is fulfilled.

Accompaniers – a community in the image of the Church

About this time, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenists made a complaint against the Hebrews: in the daily distribution their own widows were being overlooked. So the Twelve called a full meeting of the disciples and addressed them, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food: you, brothers, must select from among yourselves seven men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom, to whom we can hand over this duty. We ourselves will continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word.' The whole assembly approved of this proposal and elected Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolaus of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these to the apostles, and after prayer they laid their hands on them.

Acts 6:1-6

Here, as throughout Acts, Luke introduces us to the life of the first Church groups, telling us of how the Hellenist widows felt abandoned. Their complaint to the apostles led to the institution of the Seven. It is difficult to compare 'the Seven' to us as a group of accompaniers; but several elements of the text can help us to live this service.

Those who complained were Hellenists, Jews of Greek culture and language who lived all round the Mediterranean. Today, members of the YCW who come from different cultures bring this to their teams: it is a call to be attentive to difference. The victims were widows: women in emotional and material distress. We can

reflect on the distress many young people find themselves in, and the social role which the accompanier can play.

The Seven are chosen from among the disciples. An accompanier has to become an accompanier himself, by living in communion with Christ through personal prayer and prayer in community, reading the Gospel, serving the poor: the YCW is a movement based on the Gospel.

Peter calls these disciples brothers. Today's disciples are also called to live as brothers, particularly where the family is fragile. Luke reminds us that these first communities were 'united, heart and soul'. (Acts 4:32)

Peter's criteria for choosing the Seven

They must have a good reputation, crucial for us today when we accompany young people, particularly the under-18s, whose parents put their trust in us. We have a huge moral responsibility towards them. They should not be afraid to confide in us; we should inspire confidence in them.

They must also be filled with the Holy Spirit. We know that if the Spirit were not with us, we would all have given up on our mission. The Spirit gives us strength to carry on, to persevere in difficult times; gives us his light when we don't see clearly what needs to be done. In particular, the Spirit gives us the folly to say yes when we are asked to be accompaniers, and makes us continue in confidence and hope. The Spirit also gives wisdom, making us step back from awkward situations, letting us pause, revisit our accompaniment, do the review of life, and go forward step by step.

We should also note that they were called, elected: this is a vocation. In the Church, we do not give a mission to ourselves, but receive it. This is particularly important as

the Church's mission is the Father's Mission – revealing his love to all humanity. To accompany the young people of the YCW is to reveal to them their dignity as human beings and as beloved children of the Father.

Luke's focus on two of the Seven

Stephen, filled with faith and the Holy Spirit, has a solid faith in Christ, and audacity in speech. To be an accompanier is to be a disciple of Christ, to have faith in him. It is also to have faith in young people – to see them grow up, speak for themselves, take on responsibilities.

Nicolaus, a proselyte, a convert to Judaism, could not take on any responsibility in his own community, but was called in the Church. 'There are many different gifts' in the community, recalls Paul (1 Cor. 12:4): we can all find our place, wherever we have come from.

The Church calls us, entrusting this mission to us

The Twelve meet, the call is made, hands are imposed (whether the whole community or only the apostles is unclear). Thus the Church calls and entrusts its mission – our accompanying YCW members is a ministry, a service to the community. Just as the Seven were called according to precise criteria, so the Church needs discernment to call people to service; just as they were chosen from among the Hellenists, so young people need to be served by adults who understand where they come from.

Being called by the community means that this is not just up to us, but to the whole community's: this is the community building itself up, choosing men and women whom it trusts and has confidence in. Being called is not an honour, but a service asked of those who can offer it. Some may not suspect that they might be called; they are surprised or even

anxious when the call comes. But we believe in them, and they are not alone in their mission, for the Spirit is in them and we are with them.

'After prayer they laid their hands on them'

This is why the Seven are prayed over and hands are laid on them. In the Jewish community this is a traditional gesture of blessing, consecration, being sent – it is to receive the strength of the Spirit and the support of all the community to live out one's mission. Together, we form the Church, we 'bear with one another, forgive each other', as Paul says (Col. 3:13).

The mission of accompanying YCW members is part of the Church's mission to proclaim the Good News of God's love for all humanity. Within the YCW, the adults' mission is to reveal the presence of Christ working in the heart of young people, to say to them, 'Your life, and the lives of your friends, have value; I recognise what is great and beautiful within you, and I would like to help you to discover this to help you grow.'

It also aims to increase the body of the Church, of which the YCW is but a part. Each of us, with our gifts and limitations, enter this mission accepted as we are; we live it together, with young people, among adults. We know that it is never easy.

The YCW tries to imitate the Church, faithfully relying on its founders' instincts, trying to build this community of faith together. Cardijn had great ambition for young people. We too place our hope in them –we rely on them to build a world of love.

(Adapted from a paper by E. Broussous, JOC de Marseille, France)