

Edina Morningside Community Church
United Church of Christ
Wednesday, July 15, 2015
Meditation: *Many Sinners Followed Jesus*

When Jeff read our New Testament scripture this evening, he used the Lectio Divina practice of reading the scripture three times. Each time you were invited to notice a particular word or phrase that spoke to you personally. Each of us may notice different words and phrases. The process of reading the text three times is to encourage us to listen more intently and to go deeper in understanding the text.

I used Lectio Divina as the basis of my preparation for this meditation. In my first reading, the phrase that stuck out for me is what I used for the title – many sinners followed Jesus. Somehow, I had not previously thought much about followers of Jesus being sinners. The disciples followed Jesus because they had been called by Jesus; they followed Jesus because they were drawn to his spiritual nature; and they followed Jesus because of his powerful healings and teachings. When I think of those who follow Jesus, my first thoughts always go to the disciples.

Secondly, the religious leaders also seemed to follow Jesus. Sometimes we are told they followed him in order to catch him up in wrong doing – healing on the Sabbath; teaching in ways inconsistent with the teachings of the synagogue; sitting at table with tax collectors (as we hear in tonight’s text); or sometimes genuinely wanting to learn from him.

Thirdly, those in need of healing followed Jesus – the hemorrhaging woman; the man whose daughter was very ill and near death, the person needing to be lifted into the waters of Bethsaida; and many others.

But in this text, I noticed for the first time, the declaration that sinners had followed Jesus. Now, since we might consider everyone as a sinner, this reference could simply be inclusive of everyone – the disciples, the religious leaders, those seeking healing – but I think the words also imply that there was a magnetism of Jesus that drew people who otherwise were not drawn to the synagogue or to other religious practices. Being drawn to Jesus – to his presence, to his actions, to his words – seemed to open his followers to greater self-awareness of their shortcomings, of their sins. Followers of Jesus desired not only to be healed, but also to be transformed, to change the path of their

lives, to learn how to love one another, to be drawn into community, to be close to the love and presence of God.

We too today, as sinners, have the opportunity to follow Jesus and to live according to his example. We have included this proclamation in our church's vision statement. Listen to what we covenant together to live within this faith community.

"We strengthen families, friends, each other and our wider community as we joyously rise to the challenge of living Jesus Christ's example." "...as we joyously rise to the challenge of living Jesus Christ's example." "...living Jesus Christ's example."

May it be so.

In my second reading of the text, the phrase that stood out to me was, "have no need of a physician". I am uncertain that Jesus means us to take this literally. On one hand, as I have just said, all of us are sinners and none of us dare to call ourselves righteous. Circumstances of all of our lives are constantly subject to change. We may think that we have no need of a physician today and tomorrow find ourselves in need of emergency care or treatment for a newly discovered cancer or treatment for our emotional and mental needs exacerbated by unexpected events in our lives.

I hear this pronouncement from Jesus as almost mocking those who considered themselves righteous. I also hear it, clearly, as a pronouncement of "extravagant welcome". It encourages me to imagine, Jesus, today, sitting with the poor, the homeless, the hungry, the immigrant, the imprisoned, and all those who have experienced injustice and oppression as outsiders of mainstream culture. I imagine Jesus standing in line at Loaves and Fishes or dining at homes where Meals on Wheels have been delivered. I imagine Jesus sitting in prison cells. I imagine Jesus sleeping on the street or seeking shelter at a local church or shelter housing facility. I imagine Jesus calling all of those who are less fortunate and all of us into the love of God and into deeper community of caring for and with one another.

In my third and final reading, words that I noticed were "follow me". Levi was called to follow Jesus just as the disciples had been. I also noticed that Jesus knew the heritage of Levi, he was the son of Alphaeus. Levi was not a stranger

to Jesus, not someone found simply on the street. Levi was conducting his business of tax collecting, which was deemed as a sin by the Hebrews of Jesus' time. We are not even told that Levi invited Jesus to his home for dinner. In this instance, following Jesus meant that Jesus invited himself for dinner to Levi's home.

In what ways do each of us, today, feel called by Jesus to follow him? Do we feel as though Jesus knows us by name? What does it mean to follow Jesus? Would we welcome Jesus into our home for dinner even if we had not had advance notice so that we could clean our house? Does following Jesus mean being a friend or member of this faith community? Does it mean giving from our abundance of our time, talent and resources to ministries of this faith community? Does being a follower of Jesus mean that our lives need to change in dramatic or even subtle ways?

Without knowing the answers to all these questions, we are called, as was Levi to be among the sinners following Jesus. Amen.