

The Calling of Matthew

⁹ As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

¹⁰ While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹² On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³ But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'^[a] For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman

¹⁸ While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live." ¹⁹ Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

²⁰ Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. ²¹ She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."

²² Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed at that moment.

²³ When Jesus entered the synagogue leader's house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, ²⁴ he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. ²⁵ After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. ²⁶ News of this spread through all that region.

Have you ever seen the film Sliding Doors? It came out in 1998 so a good while ago and stars Gwyneth Paltrow.

In the film we see the same scene twice.

In one version she gets to the tube train just in time to squeeze in through the sliding doors. Because she catches the train she gets home in time to discover her boyfriend cheating on her and her life heads in one direction.

In the second version of the scene she is slightly delayed getting to the tube train, the doors close and she has to wait for the next one...so she doesn't get home and catch her boyfriend and her life takes a different direction.

The phrase "sliding doors moment" has become quite popular and means that moment when if things were different or we responded differently life could go in a very different direction.

I was thinking of Katherine's cousin Jonathan. He works for an international bank and he lives in New York. The bank's offices were in the twin towers and on 9/11 he decided not to go into the office that day. There are many people with a similar story of a decision that could have had a very different outcome.

In our Gospel today we have three stories, three individuals or in the final story the girl and her parents.

Let's start with Matthew.

I was trying to imagine what was going on internally for him. He must have been in some inner turmoil. Perhaps he hated what he had become. Perhaps he hated the job he'd ended up doing. There must have been dissatisfaction and inner conflict.

I presume he'd heard about Jesus I mean with all that Jesus was doing I presume everyone had heard about him. And Jesus walks past and says "follow me".

Sliding doors moment.

He looks at the money. He thinks about the house he can afford and the luxuries. He thinks about how hard he worked to get where he is. He thinks about how it's better to be rich and working with the Romans than poor and being under their boot. So, he stays where he is. I wonder what his life would have gone on to be?

But that's not what happens. He gets up and leaves it all behind, a new life beckons and he becomes one of the twelve disciples. A totally different life following Jesus, discovering faith and life in God, seeing miracles, taking part in miracles...He seized his moment.

Not everyone chose as Matthew did. Remember the rich young man that comes to Jesus, what must I do to inherit eternal life?? Follow all the commandments.

I've done that – what else? Sell all you have, give to the poor and follow me. Sliding doors moment. The rich young man turns away. His wealth gets in the way.

The synagogue ruler seizes his moment. In this version he says his daughter has died, in Luke's version the news of her death comes as he begs Jesus to heal his daughter. This man has to overcome his status, any prejudice, the authorities dubious dislike of Jesus. It's now or never and Jesus comes and awakens the daughter to life.

In the meantime the woman who suffered from 12 years of bleeding decides to act. What would have happened if she hadn't? Her condition continues and poverty and ill-health bring her life to an end. But Jesus is right here right now and she decides to act. She wants it to be a secret...but Jesus knows and Jesus publicly acknowledges her faith and her healing.

I was struck by the 'now or never' aspect of the stories, the sliding doors moment where life would be very different if they didn't respond. Matthew living a lonely, rich but dissatisfied life. Grieving parents. A life coming to an end more quickly and in poverty. But each person responded to Jesus presence and things turned out very differently.

That said, if we assume there's only ever a single moment of choosing to follow Jesus we would be ignoring the reality of parables he taught.

The grace of God is so very great, so very compassionate and loving, that if we miss a moment to respond God doesn't turn away from us and say "well you had your chance!"

Like the Shepherd not giving up until the sheep is found, the woman searching and searching until the coin is found. The father watching and watching until the lost son returns, God in his grace is seeking us, presenting us

with opportunity to accept his will and purpose for our lives.

If we see Jesus as the good shepherd leading us through life, there will be frequent moments when we have a choice. My way, or His way. Grace to choose to follow. The Christian Art email on Thursday was this picture of the peace maze Castlewellan Forest Park, Mourne Mountains, County Dawn, Northern Ireland,



Recent choices you've made may have brought you near to God. Somehow you may realise that inadvertently you've ended up lost. Again!

There are times Jesus deliberately takes us on a long and wandering journey re-visiting places we'd rather hoped we've left behind. His purpose? The healing of our souls.

I believe there's a choice to make every day and throughout the day. To follow Jesus. Life is full of random

twists and turns, the very idea we can control, organise, and subdue life is laughable. Just when you think everything's sorted....The answer. To keep following. To keep seeking. In each and every situation we come to Jesus.

Good Shepherd of my soul,
Come dwell within me;
Take all I am and mould
Your likeness in me.
Before the cross of Christ,
This is my sacrifice:
A life laid down and ready to follow.

The troubled find their peace
In true surrender;
The prisoners their release
From chains of anger.
In springs of living grace
I find a resting place
To rise refreshed and ready to follow.

I'll walk this narrow road
With Christ before me,
Where thorns and thistles grow
And cords ensnare me.
Though doubted and denied,
He never leaves my side,
But lifts my head and calls me to follow.

And when my days are gone,
My strength is failing,
He'll carry me along
Through death's unveiling.
Earth's struggles overcome,
Heaven's journey just begun
To search Christ's depths and ever to follow.