

Sermon: FELSISA Synodical Convention

Text: Luke 5:27-31 – The Calling of Levi Matthew

Theme: Trusting, Welcoming, Caring (FELSISA Values)

Goal: To strengthen the Christian Values in the life and behavior of FELSISA members.

Dear Friends in Christ,

*Introduction:* Would you invite a well-known and notorious corrupted politician to come to your church? Or would you accept a prostitute to be part of your circle of friends? What about having some HIV/AIDS infected people at your table for lunch? Would you do it? - Jesus did!

Maybe some of you are thinking that pastor Walter is crazy. In short, “*we are a respectful church and our families don't mix with big sinners*”... - This is my feeling as well, as a good Christian and a faithful pastor. - But our churches are more similar to the established Jewish church of the time of Jesus, led by the Pharisees and the Sadducees, than to the little community of the disciples led by Jesus.

Jesus treated people just the opposite way of what the Pharisees were practicing: Jesus called Matthew and Zacchaeus, notorious corrupted people (Luke 19:1-10); Jesus forgave the adulterous woman and had Mary Magdalene in His group with other women (John 8:1-11; Luke 8:2); Jesus sat at the table of Simon the leper and was not scared to touch many very sick and infected people (Mark 14:3).

The story of The Calling of Levi shows us in a good way how Jesus did His mission and what His goal was; and the story is a good illustration to FELSISA Values: Trusting, Welcoming and Caring.

## *I – Trusting*

Jesus had been ministering in Capernaum for some time and probably Levi Matthew had heard about Him and even had seen Him. Levi was in a good financial position as a tax collector. But usually the tax collectors were hated by the local people, because they were working for the Romans, who oppressed the people, and they collected more taxes than the Law required, getting lot of money for themselves with this illicit practice. The tax collectors were always put in the category of “big sinners”, side by side with robbers and prostitutes.

Levi Matthew didn't doubt or argue when Jesus called him: “Follow me!” He “got up, left everything and followed Him.”

This is TRUST. Trust in Jesus' powerful and gracious Word. Levi Matthew was touched in his heart by the grace of God, felt His love and concern about him, a poor and miserable sinner, and followed Jesus.

The Word of Jesus in the Bible is to be trusted, not to be just examined as any other book to find out if it is true or not, worthy to be accepted or not. Of course we have many doubts and we have the right to question Jesus, as Thomas did it several times. But at the end we have to conform ourselves with the revelation of the resurrected Jesus and confess boldly: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

Levi Matthew was chosen by God to be one of the four Evangelists. He wrote a Gospel, a narrative of the birth, life, teachings, deeds, death and resurrection of Jesus. What he wrote is not merely his report from a particular point of view, but it is the Inspired Word of God, like all the other books of the Bible. As Levi Matthew trusted the Word of Jesus when He called him from behind his tax booth and Matthew obeyed Jesus' Word, following Him, so shall we trust God's Word and follow Him. Without trusting God's Word, any efforts to live a godly life to please God will be in vain. And we know that Jesus is the Living Word of God, the only One who reveals God's heart to us.

## *II – Welcoming*

As Levi Matthew was welcomed by Jesus as he was, a tax collector and sinner, he was sure that Jesus would welcome his friends as well. He invited several other tax collectors and held a great banquet for them, for Jesus and for the disciples. This is a vivid picture of the happiness of a forgiven sinner: He wants to share his joy and his new life with his friends and family in the presence of Jesus. Maybe Levi Matthew had offered lots of banquets to his friends in the past; but this one was a different one: Jesus was there, the new purpose of Levi's life!

Who are invited to feast and to have a braai in our houses? Our family, our friends... Are all of them Christians? Is Jesus always invited as well? Non-Christians have difficulty to come to our churches when invited. But they will not refuse an invitation to a braai at our homes. And maybe this is the big opportunity to introduce them to Jesus, offering a prayer or a devotion before the meal.

It is not said in the Gospel how many friends of Levi Matthew were converted that day and how many confessed their faith in Jesus. But the seed was sown.

The Watchword at St. Thomas this year is: “Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you” (Mark 5:19). The goal is to reach the members of the family and friends who are not church goers. It's just a beginning.

Welcoming has another aspect: If someone comes to my home, he must receive special attention. I cannot ignore him. It is the same at the church: When a visitor comes, he must be welcome, be greeted, people have to talk with him. If not, he will never come back, even when he likes God's Word but he was not welcome in the fellowship of the Christian family.

I had a bad experience during my last holidays in Europe. I went to a Lutheran Service, but I was like an invisible man. Nobody

noticed me, nobody welcomed me before the Service or after the service. Even the pastor didn't go to the door to greet the people immediately after the service. I went there and introduced myself to him. This is not Welcoming...

## *II – Caring*

Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees for “eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners”. His answer was: “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” The Pharisees, like many today, thought they were righteous people and didn't need a Saviour. Jesus came to care for the needy in their spiritual needs and in their physical needs.

Jesus ministry was a ministry of care. Levi Matthew, was not a man in material need; he was a wealthy and rich man! But he was in spiritual need and Jesus came to help him. Many other were helped by Jesus in their physical and material need: sick, distressed, hungered, desperate... and Jesus had a word of care and a hand to help each of them. We are Jesus mouth, hands, and feet, to do His caring work nowadays. We have to go into the houses of the needy, spiritually and bodily needy, to help them on behalf of Jesus. This is not just a Social Work as many Social Entities are doing. But it is faith in action by love, showing the mercy of Christ to the needy. Don't close your eyes to the needs of the world. Be merciful.

*Conclusion: “Fed by a river of God's grace – (and) letting it flow to every place”*, this is FELSISA Vision Statement. Jesus is the source for whatever we are and do. In Him we trust, on His behalf we welcome all and on His behalf we care for the needy, and His love flows through us to all. Amen.

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