**No 1 Party at Levi’s house Luke 5 v 27 to 32**

Jesus and food – perhaps it’s a connection we rarely make yet there are several occasions where, having a meal with someone, made a significant impact on their lives. So, what does food have to do with how we do church. Clearly, we often have food as part of the way we meet – that’s because eating a meal with someone expresses both our dependence on God (that’s why we say grace) and on other people. Without words, meals express friendship and community.

In Jesus day in both Roman and Jewish society, meals expressed the social order – that’s why people were very sensitive about where they sat (see Luke 14:1f) because it portrayed their place in society. Jewish food laws forbade Jews to eat with Gentiles – so meals were divisive and publicly revealed who was ‘in’ and who wasn’t.

1. What part do meals play in your lives?

Talk about times where you have experienced real fellowship in a meal situation.

Do we tend to have meals with people we’re comfortable with?

Are we ever too extravagant in the meals we offer?

The story of Levi reveals a pattern in Jesus’ ministry. In Jesus’ time, tax collectors were hated by the people – they were seen as Roman stooges who were not averse to adding surcharges to the money they collected for the occupying power. His engagement with Levi produces a negative reaction from the Pharisees who considered themselves above any social interaction with such people.

1. The Pharisees practiced a kind of separatism where they saw society as divided into social classes.

Is that how we see 21st century England?

Without admitting it, do we sometimes limit the people we think we can talk to about God?

Have we made Christianity too ‘middle class’? (church going statistics would suggest we have)

What does Jesus’ approach to Levi teach us today?

Both the approach and response recorded in the Bible are quick and decisive. Some think that Levi had heard Jesus’ teaching on another occasion so was ready to respond when the call came. If that’s true (or not), Jesus says ‘follow me’ and Levi responds immediately leaving behind his lucrative business. Jesus has initiated the encounter and his words, alongside several other similar encounters, are about following ‘HIM’. He was not inviting Levi to a new way of thinking but to a lifelong personal commitment.

1. When we talk to people about God do we talk too much about ‘ideas’ rather than the person of Jesus?

Are we sometimes reluctant to talk about personal commitment to Jesus?

Do we prolong our conversations with people without getting to a point of commitment?

Does our culture suggest we mustn’t get too personal or our friends might be frightened away?

What follows is extraordinary. Levi invites all his tax collector friends along with other low-lifes (as the Pharisees described them – ‘sinners’) to a big party meal. Jesus, the disciples, and some of the most hated people in society gathered in one room. Levi is using his house to bring together his newly found Jesus followers and all the crooks he has worked with for years.

1. Levi has created a gathering where his work associates can know why he’s left his job and found a new purpose and direction to his life. He feeds them so they feel welcome.

What is the modern parallel to that?

Are we too centred on ‘getting people to church’ rather than offering hospitality?

The Pharisees are critical because they cannot cope with the idea of a spiritual leader hanging out with people of much lower standing. In their thinking, such people should associate with people of similar backgrounds and intellect. In 1st century society, sitting at a table communicated an acceptance of the person you sat with. Jesus has clearly not made Levi and his friends second class citizens. Eating with them made them out to be people of value.

1. What should be our attitude to Christian friends who try to make contact with those people not connected to church?

Levi’s party is a kind of outreach group where food plays a central role?

Should we try to facilitate such gatherings and what would they look like?

Jesus is anxious that the critical Pharisees know his thinking and strategy. He uses a powerful image of going to the doctor which is one image that transfers easily to the 21st century. When I go to a doctor, I know that I need help and I cannot help myself. The doctor has the answer to my problem. So, Jesus goes looking, and is still looking, for ‘sinners’ so they can come to him in repentance and faith (See Luke 3:7 to 14).

1. Jesus reaches out to sinners because he sees the potential for their being renewed by God’s grace.

Levi then wants his friends to know about his new found faith in Jesus Christ.

How can we facilitate such things today?

Do we realise that being without Christ is a serious matter?

Are we so involved with ‘Churchianity’ that we miss the need to reach out with the gospel?

**Maybe we should all think about how we could put on a meal/party and invite our friends to come along.**

**Levi mixed his two worlds – the old world of cheating tax collectors met with his new friends committed to Jesus**

**How can we do that?**