

Friday in the Second Week of Advent

December 11, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Isaiah 48:17-19; Psalm 1; Matthew 11:16-19

In spite of encounter of John and Jesus at the Jordan, Matthew and Luke both share the story from the Sayings Source of John the Baptist sending disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?”¹ Jesus answers by telling those disciples to tell John what he has been doing: “The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me.”²

As Jesus’ public ministry begins, all was going well for a time. Eventually Jesus will be seen and heard saying to a paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”³ Some scribes standing there think he is blaspheming. Jesus calls them out. He says, “For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? . . . [Jesus] then said to the paralytic—‘Rise, take up your bed and go home.’”⁴

¹ Matthew 11:3; Luke 7:19.

² Matthew 11:4–5.

³ Matthew 9:2.

⁴ Matthew 9:5–7.

The next thing he does is call Matthew the tax collector, two words in Greek and English, “Follow me.”⁵ Matthew recognizes immediately that Jesus is, in New Testament commentator Ulrich Luz’s words, his “Lord and teacher.”⁶ But, a group of Pharisees are not happy. They ask Jesus’ disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”⁷ Jesus responds, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”⁸

It’s in this context that Jesus speaks to those who are there, “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places and calling to their playmates, ‘We piped to you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’”⁹ concludes, “The accusation that Jesus is a glutton and drunkard goes back in substance to the time of Jesus.” Of the entire short passage that we heard today, Luz says “[these words] *may* indeed come from Jesus.”¹⁰

⁵ Matthew 9:9.

⁶ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1–7: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 18.

⁷ Matthew 9:11.

⁸ Matthew 9:12–13.

⁹ Matthew 11:16–17.

¹⁰ Luz, 148.

About Matthew the evangelist, Raymond Brown wrote, “A Greek-speaker, who knew Aramaic or Hebrew or both and was not an eyewitness of Jesus’ ministry, [he] drew on Mark and a collection of the sayings of the Lord”—the Sayings Source—as well as on other available traditions, oral or written. Probably a Jewish Christian.”¹¹ Brown also wrote this about the evangelist, “Mark had been designed to make Jesus intelligible to a Gentile audience; and [Matthew], in order to serve a community that was becoming more and more Gentile, found Mark a useful framework into which to incorporate [the Sayings Source], a very Jewish collection of Jesus’ teaching.”¹²

May the Jesus of the New Testament remain for all of us our Lord and our teacher.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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¹¹ Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 172.

¹² *Ibid.*, 204.