

Walking with Jesus as our friend

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[0 : 00] We're going to have our Bible reading now. Anna Lorna is going to read to us. It's from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 2. It's about Jesus walking along and meeting a man called Levi.

And so Anna Lorna is just going to read from Mark 2, verses 13 to 17. Once again, Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them.

As he walked along, he saw Levi, son of Althea, sitting at the tax collector's booth. Follow me, Jesus told him. And Levi got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples. For there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law, who were Pharisees, saw him eating with sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners. So we're going to think a little bit this morning about walking with Jesus as your friend from Mark 2, which is what Anna Lauren read to us just a little while ago from the Gospel of Mark.

[1 : 25] I'm going to think about Levi's life before he met Jesus and after he met Jesus. And as I was thinking about how his life changed before and after, I was thinking about my own life and how it's changed with lockdown.

So there's life before lockdown and there's life after lockdown. And they've been really different. So life before lockdown.

Well, here's my yellow chair. I love to sit in this chair and relax or read or chat to people. But, you know, sometimes I have to get out of the chair.

Before lockdown, especially, I had to get out of the chair. And I never loved to get out of the chair.

But there you go. That's me struggling out of the chair. Thinking, oh, better get going.

And each day, get up, get out of the chair and off to work. And almost every single day, I walked up this road. I don't know if you can recognize what road it is, but it's Morningside Road.

[2 : 34] So I'd walk up the hill towards Holy Corner. And there's Holy Corner. And we've got an office up there. So each day, walking up the road, again, up the hill, getting towards Holy Corner.

Each day, walking up the hill, always on my own, just wandering along on my way to work. Hurrying along, just seeing the same things every day.

But life since lockdown has been really different. The walks I go on are completely different. I don't know if you can see that, but that's a picture of Edinburgh from Blackford Hill, looking towards the castle and a little bit of Salisbury Crags and Arthur's Sea.

And beautiful walks as well out in the Pentland Hills. So I've been walking different places since lockdown started.

And the other thing is, I haven't been walking on my own all the time since lockdown started. So do you want to see some of the people that I've been going for walks with? Well, here they are. They didn't want to be identified publicly with me.

[3 : 48] So all you can see is their silhouettes. But there you go. These are the people that walk with me almost every single day of lockdown. So I'm not walking on my own and we're going to much more interesting places.

And I have to say, walking with other people to new places and different places is a lot better than walking on my own all the time.

So here's the Thursday thought that Jesus invites us to walk with him as our friend. When you get up in Thursday, you think, what was church about? Now, just remember that, that when we see the story of Levi and Jesus says to Levi, come and follow me.

Jesus is just walking along the road. He sees Levi. He says, come and follow me. Jesus is actually saying the same thing to you. He's coming past your life and he's saying, follow me. Come with me. Walk with me. And just the way that lockdown has kind of changed my life in some ways. Meeting Jesus, walking with Jesus really changed Levi's life.

[4 : 59] His before and after Jesus is really different. So here's what Levi's life was all about before he met Jesus. Money. He was a tax collector for the Roman authorities.

And that made him really unpopular. Because nobody liked the guys who worked for the Roman authorities. And also, these guys were really greedy. They had a lot of money. But they used to cheat.

So they were liars. And they would cheat. And they would charge people extra money and stick it in their own pocket. Which means that just as I used to walk up Morningside Road every morning on my own, Levi was actually quite a lonely figure.

Nobody really liked him. He sat at the side of the road at a table collecting money as people came through, through the village or the town of Capernaum. He always took more than he should.

So when we read the story of Levi, Levi is not one of the good guys, okay? He's one of the bad guys. And nobody liked him.

[6 : 05] Because he worked for the Romans and he lied, cheated and stole. And for him, life was all about money. And in fact, it seems like he probably preferred money more than people.

It was more important to him to have a lot of money than to have a lot of friends. So he ends up lonely. But now he gets a new friend, Jesus.

And with Jesus, his life really begins to change. He invites Jesus to his house. And he throws a party for other tax collectors and some other people who weren't very popular either.

So when Jesus walks by and says to Levi, follow me, and Levi gets up and follows Jesus, he's leaving behind an old life and he's starting a new life.

If you and I begin to walk with Jesus, that means leaving behind an old life and starting a new life. Things change forever. So here's a bit of a before and after.

[7 : 11] You can see it up there on the screen for Levi. Before Jesus, his life was about money. He was very unpopular. He was a lonely person. But once you start to walk with Jesus, you know what?

You are never alone. Ever. He is always with us, he says. Even in lockdown, Jesus is with us. Even if you've been in lockdown all on your own, in your flat somewhere with nobody to see day by day, you're not alone if Jesus is with you.

And the other thing is that when we begin to walk with Jesus, you know, we go to new places and our life has a new purpose. So you're never alone.

You've got Jesus, the friend who sticks closer than a brother. And Levi is going to end up going places he never dreamt of. His life would never be dull or boring. Walking with Jesus is an adventure.

It's the best life possible. And he takes Levi to some very unusual places. And sometimes, actually, these places are not easy, are they?

[8 : 20] They're not nice. He was at the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested. He was at Golgotha or Calvary when Jesus was crucified.

But you know what? Because of Jesus' love for him, even in these hard places, he began to see even more of how much God cared for him.

That Jesus truly loved him. And even though he wasn't a very good friend to Jesus at points, even though I'm not a very good friend to Jesus at points, Jesus is always a good friend to Levi and always a good friend to me.

He loves us fully and completely. He is a friend who never lets us down. So when we make friends with Jesus and walk with him, life changes.

We're a new person. We go to new places. We have a new purpose. Levi, as he's called here in Mark's Gospel, has another name, Matthew.

[9 : 23] And he's the same Matthew who wrote the Gospel of Matthew. I think that's amazing, isn't it? When we start to walk with Jesus, we get a new direction and a new purpose.

He was a guy who used to rip everyone off. He was a scammer. But now he's a guy who's writing a Gospel that's told the good news of Jesus to billions of people across the world and down through history.

His life changes in such a good, profound, and wonderful, positive way. When you and I choose to walk with Jesus, our lives will get a bigger and a better purpose.

So when we walk with Jesus, he never leaves us. We don't get a map from Jesus about what life will look like in the future when we walk with him.

He doesn't show us, hey, Neil Macmillan, this is your life and this is the route you're going to take. In fact, when you walk with Jesus, it's often quite foggy. So that's a picture from the top of Blackford Hill.

[10 : 29] So the last picture I showed you of Blackford Hill a number of slides ago looked out to the castle in Arthur's Seat. Well, that's the same view from the same place, but on a different day.

The fog has closed in. You couldn't see very far ahead. And even for Christians, life often still feels quite foggy, doesn't it? You know, a bit misty.

We can't really sort of wipe the screen and see the future. But we do know this. Jesus is always with us and he will guide us.

And when we walk with him, he will be the perfect friend, the perfect guide, leading us through hard and difficult things and leading us towards our heavenly home, the new creation where God dwells forever.

So life before Jesus, it was about money. It was unpopular, lonely life with Jesus. Never alone, new places, new purpose.

[11 : 31] Now, you might be asking yourself some different questions right now. And I suppose one of the questions you might ask yourself is this, is, can Jesus really be my friend?

Can someone like Jesus, who's so good, so perfect, so great, really be my friend? I'm sure Levi kind of felt like that. Nobody liked Levi.

But here's this really popular person, Jesus. The crowds are following Jesus around. And this really popular guy, the one that everybody wants to be friends with, stops and says to Levi, will you be my friend?

And so he must have thought, is this real? And the people who are invited to the dinner party at Levi's house, they were probably thinking the same thing. What's going on?

Why is Jesus here? What's he doing with people like us? Because everybody else hates us. We're the kind of scumbags that people look down on. We're the dirtbags. So they're amazed at Jesus because what they're finding out is, Jesus loves all kinds of people.

[12 : 40] And Jesus loves scumbags and dirtbags and people who mess up and people who get things wrong. And even people who lie and people who cheat and people who've stolen. Jesus' kingdom, Jesus' friendship is open to all of us, no matter what we've done or who we are.

So if you're asking, is this for real? Does Jesus really want to walk with me? The answer is yes. Whoever you are, Jesus is willing to walk with you. How can someone like Jesus be friends with people like us?

Well, I think we have to look to the cross there, to the way that Jesus died. You know, Jesus had many friends at this point, but he dies a lonely death.

But Levi was lonely and then finds a friend who will always be with him forever. So the one who was popular with the people became hated, so the one who was hated by the people can become loved. That's what happens at the cross. The one who at this point all the crowds are following, Jesus, he's so popular at this point. He allows himself to become hated and be killed on the cross, so that the one who's hated, Levi, can become someone who is loved forever.

[14 : 10] It's through the cross that Levi is able to be forgiven for his sins. The lies, the cheating, the stealing, all the wrong that he'd done, the people that he'd hurt.

All of that is forgiven when Jesus, his friend, dies for him on the cross. That's how he and Jesus can be friends again.

That's how God's love can come into his life. So all the wrong that I've done is Neil McMillan living in this world. My lies or my cheating, the people I've hurt, the things I've done.

How can that be forgiven? It's forgiven when Jesus dies on the cross in my place for my sin. How can you be forgiven?

The only way is through Jesus taking your place, taking all that's due to you for your sin, so that you too can be forgiven.

[15 : 12] No matter how young you are or how old, that message is true. It's the same for all of us. There's only one way of forgiveness. It's through the cross of Jesus. It's through the cross of Jesus

that we can become his friends.

So I want to say to you, whoever you are today, please hear what Jesus is saying to you. You need his friendship and to have his friendship. You need to look to his death on the cross.

This is one way that Jesus puts it, isn't it? That it's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

So Jesus does want you to be his friend.

He calls you to be his friend. He calls you to follow him and to walk with him. He'll be the best friend that you ever have because he's willing to lay his life down for you.

What an amazing friend that is who will lay his life down for you. And he says that this is what you need because in a way we're all sick.

[16:14] And if somebody says, well, I'm not sick, they're never going to call the doctor, are they?

They're never going to think I need help. If you think, well, I'm not really a sinner. Sinners are the really bad people.

You know, people like Levi maybe, you know, criminals, cheats, robbers, scammers. They need Jesus. I don't. But Jesus was really trying to say, well, if we don't think we need his help, we're never going to turn to him to be saved.

If we don't think we need his help, if we won't admit we're sinners, we won't turn to him for forgiveness. Only sick people call a doctor. Only people who know they're sinners call the Savior.

So I want to say to you, although you might not think of yourself as the worst person ever, it's not about comparing yourself to other people. Am I sicker or more healthy than them?

It's about looking to God in his perfection and saying, have I matched up to God and what he wants of me? Have I loved God with all my heart?

[17:24] Have I loved my neighbor as myself all the time and in every way? We all have to just say to Jesus, I need your help. Please be my Savior.

And when we say that to Jesus, he is the best friend we will ever have. I never walk alone. So I became a Christian probably when I was about 12 years old.

So 40 years ago, I became a Christian. And I've not always been a very good friend to Jesus. And sometimes my life has looked messier than others.

But he has never left me alone. He's always been my friend. So even when I was showing you this picture of walking my own up Morningside Road earlier on, actually, I've never walked up Morningside Road on my own.

Every day when I walk up Morningside Road to go to work, do you know who's with me? Jesus. And when I walk up that road, I'm talking to Jesus, talking to him about the people I see and the shops I pass.

[18:28] I'm talking to him about my family or I'm talking to him about Cornerstone and what's happening at Cornerstone and what's happening at Cornerstone. I might even be talking to him about you and asking him for his blessing in your life.

I might be talking to him about what's going on in the day ahead of me. So when I walk up Morningside Road, God is with me. Jesus is with me. He's the friend who is always with me.

I really want to say to each person who's watching today, but especially for the children and the young adults, he is the best friend you will ever have.

You'll find out in life that other friends come and go. But here's the friend who's always going to be with you. From the youngest of your days of your life right into old age, Jesus will be there walking with you.

And so his question to you is, will you walk with me? He's walking past. Don't let him go. He's saying, follow me.

[19:36] Don't just watch him going past you. But say, yeah, Jesus, I will follow you. I want to walk with you.

Let's just say a short prayer. Lord Jesus, thank you that you invite us to walk with you. And we pray that we would say yes to that invitation today, that every single person who's on this service today would want to say, Lord Jesus, I want to be your friend.

I want to walk with you. Please be my savior. Forgive my sin. Thank you for the cross. Lord Jesus, thank you for the cross. That you love us so much that you'll take our sin in yourself and pay such a great price so that we can be your friends forever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.