

The New Community

“New” Series Week 4

May 7, 2017

Luke 5:27-32

Welcome/Intro/Vision

If you're just joining us we've been saying over the past couple of weeks that for many of us at various points in our lives, something NEW came along and changed our lives for the better:

a new job, a new relationship, some new opportunity was a turning point for something great that happened in our lives

New has potential to bring new energy, new opportunities, new hopes and dreams

But the problem is that new in this word has a very short shelf-life. New in this world has a very predictable pattern that just about everything follows from cars to houses to bodies and jobs:

New to familiar to old to broken to gone

And all of us have scars from living in this world—a world where relationships break down, promises break down, bodies break down, disappointments and frustrations sometimes feel like they're at every turn

And what the Scriptures claim that God has done in Jesus is take this whole progression and run it backwards, done a complete end-around on the laws of physics

On Easter Sunday, Jesus who WAS dead and gone is raised from that dead and gone by God his heavenly Father

And he's been raised from the dead in order to establish a New New that will never grow old, never fall apart, never decay or be gone ever again

And what it means to become a Christian is to enter into this NEW NEW thing that God has done in Jesus

where we trust him with our lives and we follow him, and in doing so, we're made new right along with him

Today we're going to read about a party that Jesus was at the center of

Jesus loved parties, in fact the religious people of his day accused him of being a drunk because he was at parties so much

So Jesus loved parties, but because of the invite list, this party was likely one of the most awkward parties that many of the people there had ever experienced

Think of your most awkward party or family gathering or office gathering experience.

The combination of people and personalities wasn't quite right

maybe what so and so did to that person last week or last month or a couple of years ago still hangs in the room—maybe someone's just had some drama or scandal in their lives and everyone knows about it but no one's saying anything about it

Did I just describe your last family get-together? Can you remember how that felt? Great!
We're going to step into an even MORE awkward party situation that Jesus helps create

Jesus is going to put people in the same room and NOBODY's going to be 100% comfortable with it

And what Jesus does within the context of this awkward party is it creates the context for making everyone who's present New.

The gathering we're going to look at is full of tensions and awkwardness and what do you do when you're invited to a gathering that you know is likely to be full of tension and awkwardness?

You play sick! Pretend you've got something else on the calendar: kids soccer game, pluck your eyebrows, recreational lobotomy—anything to avoid this situation!

BUT if the people in this story had missed this awkward party, they would have missed out on the invitation and opportunity to be made new

Two realities surface today:

- 1. Most of us avoid tense or awkward relationships or situations BUT...**
- 2. Sometimes we have to follow Jesus into and through the tension or awkwardness in order to be made new**

We're going to look at a story in Matthew 9 if you've got a Bible you can turn with me there, if not it'll be on the screen:

⁹As 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.

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

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

The world that Jesus is inhabiting is occupied territory. The Romans have steamrolled everything known in the Mediterranean basin

And as Jesus walks throughout Israel, there are signs all over the place that he is in occupied and aqueducted territory—there are Roman soldier here and there

And there are also tax-collecting booths—collecting taxes to pass along to Caesar and the occupying Roman forces.

Now, ANYONE HERE LOVE PAYING TAXES? Well, NO ONE loves paying taxes to an occupying force

But to make matters worse the tax-collectors were authorized to basically tax as much money as they wanted to.

There was a minimum amount due to Rome, but they could charge above and beyond that as much as they wanted and keep the rest for themselves.

But to make matters EVEN worse, many of these tax-collecting booths were run by Jews! Imagine!

If Canada stormed south and over-ran the US and one of you started walking around draped in a Canadian flag, you tripled my taxes and you started saying “EH” all the time chances are you and I wouldn’t be hanging out on the weekends.

THIS is the guy that Jesus calls to be his follower! Matthew is a Jew who has betrayed his people in order to make some money

Now, this would have been bad enough for Jesus to call this guy to be a disciple

But to make it even worse, Matthew throws a banquet, a party for Jesus with all these other tax collectors and trouble-makers—and Jesus comes!

And at this party with Jesus is that awkward mix of people that we talked about earlier! [**Jesus’s Awkward Party Mix**]

1. **You’ve got the tax collector’s and “sinners”**—those who the Jewish people at the time would consider non-religious and actively doing stuff that would indicate that they’re not a part of or into the whole God thing
2. **You’ve got Pharisees**—these are the religious leaders, the righteous ones, the ones who do the God-thing and do it all the time
3. **You’ve got the disciples.** These guys are mostly good Jewish boys who wouldn’t typically be with this crowd of people on a Friday night.

I want us to drill down into these three groups of people, who they are and what they’re about And to get really familiar with this setting, this picture

Because Jesus isn’t just making individuals new, he’s making a whole new community made up of all kinds of different people—and it’s the kind of church he wants us to be

And because sometimes we have to follow Jesus into tension and awkwardness in order to be made new

So Jesus calls this guy Matthew and Matthew leaves his good-paying job to follow Jesus.

Think about that. What would Jesus have to do or say to you to get you to quit your job and leave everything to follow him permanently to Thailand or Africa or Saudi Arabia?

In my small group, folks pretty much agreed that Jesus himself would have to show up at our door and tell us in person!

And one person in my small group said that if that happened and Jesus came knocking on his door that he'd tell Jesus to hold on a minute and he'd give me a call: "Alex, I've got a problem!" Then hand the phone over to Jesus to let me deal with him!

Matthew's life is totally made NEW by this decision to leave EVERYTHING about his life as it was in order to follow Jesus. That's incredible. Plenty of people would have stopped there, written books about it

But Matthew has this wonderful, incredible instinct: I'm going to throw a party and invite everyone else who was doing just what I was doing before I left it all to follow Jesus.

When Jesus pours new life into us, we are always supposed to be a conduit of that new life, not merely a container of that new life

We are to be a conduit of grace not a cult-de-sac of grace, we are to live generous lives, not hoarding lives

So Matthew invites all of his old buddies partying and tax-collecting, traitor buddies who are not the religious type at all.

These are people who aren't doing the synagogue thing on Saturday!

They don't hang out with religious types in part because they get judged all the time, just like the Pharisees do here!

Maybe some of them are interested in spiritual things, or curious about Jesus whose kind of becoming a rock star in the area

maybe some of them are just hardened cynics, maybe some of them are really hungry for God maybe some of them are just hungry for a party!

Regardless, Matthew invites them and Jesus is delighted with this gathering! Because Jesus has not come to call people who look religious, sound religious, and can check off the religious boxes.

And Jesus looks at THIS group of people and says "This is why I have come! I have come to make THESE people, people who are NOT well and who at some level know that they're not well--I've come to make these people NEW! "

And if this is what Jesus has come to do, and if he's making us New in part to participate in his mission of making all things new along with him

And if this is a church that's all about following Jesus
then our church if we're working right will look a whole lot like the party at Matthew's house.

If you're here this morning, and you don't feel like you fit into what church people should look like: you belong here, this church is Jesus's church, he loved being with people just like you, this church is for you.

If you're here this morning and you're considering faith for the first time or you're thinking about coming back to faith after a long time away

And even if you know that you've got stuff in your life that's not really what church-type of people should be doing or should be like

This is Jesus' church, and you were his type of people; welcome, you belong here.

Now, there is a small catch—when we start taking Jesus seriously and start following him seriously, he's going to make us NEW!

Just like Matthew, he's going to call us to FOLLOW HIM and sometimes that means leaving a whole bunch of stuff behind!!

he's going to call us into the kind of lives we've been talking about, where we're all being made new as we follow his lead.

See, everyone in this story is invited into being changed and made New by Jesus

the Pharisees and religious leaders get called out big-time by Jesus, we'll talk about that in a minute;

the disciples are led by Jesus into a place they would rather not go we'll talk about that in a minute

And Jesus loves the non-religious folks and they're getting gently corrected, invited, re-directed into a new life with him.

And the word to EVERYONE in this story is an invitation into NEW LIFE: transformation, and change and growth: Pharisees, disciples, and tax-collectors and sinners.

Now, let's pause for a minute and ask this question: why would a bunch of non-religious types come to Matthew's house to hang out with Jesus, the greatest religious teacher the world has ever known? How do they end up there?

Because Matthew invites them

If there's any way for Chatham Community Church to look like the Party at Matthew's House, do you know the part of tax collector's joining us will happen?

Because we're going to invite them.

Invitations are one of the holiest habits you can cultivate if you're a Jesus person: inviting people to your home, inviting people to your life, inviting people into a spiritual conversation: do you have a church background? Does spirituality or faith mean anything to you right now?

Maybe inviting people to church, inviting people into your small group.

If you're a Jesus person here today, there is likely someone around you who needs an invitation to engage or re-engage in a life of faith.

And my question for you this morning is who is it? Who is that God has put you in their life to prayerfully and gently and non-obnoxiously but intentionally invite?

Invite into your life, love on them with Jesus' love OR invite into a faith conversation space like a spiritual conversation or church or your small group

Jesus is making all of us New who are willing to give him permission

and then he's calling us to play a part in creating a NEW community, just like Matthew had a part in creating a NEW community—one of the specific ways we get to do that is by inviting

Now, if it had just been the tax collectors hanging out with Jesus, this would have been a fine, not-so-awkward party.

But there are a couple of other groups of people lingering around the edges of the party that make this a little awkward

Second group of people who are here: **the Pharisees [PPT: OBJECTING PHARISEES!]**

These are the really religious people who have a real clear picture about what the people of God are supposed to look like, how they are to behave, what kind of people they should be.

And they object strenuously to the teacher, who claims to be teaching about God, and who at the same time goes to dinner with the less desirables, the tax collector's and sinners

And if the Pharisees look upon the tax collectors with disdain, how do you think the tax collectors feel about the fact that the Pharisees are hanging around this party?

"who invited those BLEEPS!"

We've still got lots of Pharisees today—people who tend to create and lean into laws and rules that they can follow that will help them to feel good about themselves.

Pharisees often look very religious and very godly but at the heart of what it means to be a Pharisee has nothing at all to do with God and everything to do with me.

It's all about me and my SELF-righteousness;

it's about me doing the things that I think make for a good person, however I might define that, and by that measuring stick I can measure up to be a good person and I can beat everyone else up with it—any of you know someone like that????

I want to have a moment here with my church-going friends. Okay? If you're not a religious person or haven't done much church in your life, you can sit back a little bit and enjoy

My friends, the truth of the matter is that every single one of us who has spent a lot of time in religious stuff, has a little bit of Pharisee in each of us.

And when people come in and start mucking around in our religious stuff who don't live up to our codes and rules, we can get a little grumpy about it.

We announced earlier that Chatham Serves is coming up on June 4th.

A couple of times a year instead of our normal Sunday morning church service we set up a bunch of different service opportunities and we go and serve the greater community

This was in place before I got here and I think it's awesome—part of what it means to be a community of Christ-followers who are following Jesus in making things new!

When I first got here almost 5 years ago now, one of the elders was saying that when they first started doing it a few people in the church were just livid about it.

Sunday mornings was supposed to be about church! We're supposed to be doing the church thing! That's what we Christians are supposed to be about on Sunday mornings!

And he was saying that a woman left the church because they cancelled the service two times out of 52 to go and serve.

My friends, that might not be your issue, but if you're a church-person chances are you've got your own issues.

could be politics or some set of moral codes or how the services are supposed to be conducted

And that stuff matters—politics and morality and how services are run on Sunday mornings, all that stuff matters!

But my fellow Pharisees, you know what I think Jesus would have said to that woman who left the church because they cancelled the service 2x a year to serve the community

and to you and to me in the midst of all the places where we have our own little rules and laws about how things in church are supposed to be?

I think he would say to the Pharisee in us the same thing he says to the Pharisees in this story:

“Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice”

Jesus there is quoting an Old Testament prophet from hundreds of years earlier when the people of Israel were doing all the right things outwardly in terms of religious observance but they'd missed the whole point of all the religious practices

Which is a hazard for any and all of us religious people!

My friends, if you're here this morning and you recognize that you've got some Pharisee in you—takes some courage to admit it but the first step is to admit the problem, and I want to invite you to do it along with me

I want to invite you and me together to hear the gentle but very direct correction of Jesus here:
go and learn what this means, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, not the ritual, not all the ways that you perform or all your religious activities.

The rituals and rules are in place to serve love, justice, and mercy and they only work right if they're serving that larger purpose
and if they're not serving love, justice, and mercy, then they are misplaced and could ruin any relationship you might have with God or the people around you whom God has called you to love

And if you're here this morning and you're a Pharisee, hear me say that there's room for you here at the table! A church that looks like dinner at Matthew's house is going to have Pharisees in it!

But in this story, the ones who get the most direct rebuke and correction from Jesus are the Pharisees, because religion can be so deceptive

And don't miss this: it's in the setting of this awkward dinner party that these issues surface. It's in the context of NEW COMMUNITY, not a prayer meeting or a Bible study, where Jesus invites them into this NEW Life

Because sometimes we have to follow Jesus into the tension or awkwardness in order to be made new

But the New only really happens on the other side if we're willing to receive and act upon the things he shows us about ourselves and about himself

Last group of folks at Dinner at Matthew's house: **disciples of Jesus**. They're not especially comfortable at Matthew's house

These are not their people! Most of the disciples are blue-collar workers who loved their land and hated the Romans and anyone who conspired with them

In fact, one of the lesser known disciples is called "Simon the Zealot" meaning he probably was a part of some of the revolutionary movement plotting to overthrow Rome

So you've got Simon the Zealot hanging out with Matthew the tax collector for 3 years in this small community of 12 guys!

Jesus is building these tensions right into his core group of followers because sometimes we have to follow Jesus into and through the tensions in order to be made New!

So Jesus brings these good Jewish boys to a party with a bunch of traitor tax collectors

And notice in this story that the Pharisees ask *the disciples* why Jesus eats with sinners and tax-collectors, not Jesus

But Jesus is the one who speaks up and answers--and I think that's at least in part because when the Pharisees ask the question of why is your teacher doing this, they have no idea! They don't know!

They wouldn't have chosen on their own to come to this kind of a party with these kinds of people!

So how does a group of good, synagogue going patriotic Jewish guys end up at a dinner full of non-religious tax-collector's and sinners and traitors?

You know how they end up here? They're following Jesus.

And following Jesus leads them to dinner at Matthew's house—good religious people into uncomfortable messy non-religious places

See, to be a Jesus following church is going to mean for us is that each Sunday morning we're hoping that tax-collectors and sinners and Pharisees and disciples can all gather around Jesus and hear what he has to say to us and how he's making us new

But it's also going to mean that we're going to have to be willing to go places outside of here where we might not have gone if it were just up to us

Because to be a Jesus follower means it's not solely up to us where we go, to be a Jesus follower means that we're going where he leads us

So you've got this awkward, wonderful party at Matthew's house where the tax collectors are annoyed that the Pharisees are around the Pharisees are annoyed that Jesus is hanging with the tax collectors

The disciples are in the corner eating popcorn and wondering why they are there

The only one who's 100% comfortable about this whole situation is Jesus!

Because he's come not just to make Levi new, not just to make the individual disciples new

but to create an entirely new community, where tax collectors and sinners and Pharisees and disciples are all invited to be reconciled to God and to be reconciled to each other all through him

And because he knows that sometimes we have to follow Jesus into and through awkwardness or tension in order to be made New

Back in February we did our first ever capital campaign to purchase land in Northern Chatham.
[PBO EDIT: If you're new here, we're one church two locations,

Our original site was up at Woods Charter School in Northern Chatham and we just launched this PBO site back in March

And at the same time we've started the process of the land purchase and eventually a building up in Northern Chatham]

And some great news to pass along, the cost of the land that we signed on was \$250,000 and already last month thanks to y'all's generosity we've gotten \$100k of that in the bank.

So we're super-excited to pay that off and save us interest on that loan, thanks so much!

And as we did that capital campaign, we talked a lot about what kind of church we wanted to be.

We talked about this promise from God to the people of Israel during a very difficult time in their history that God would take this little sprig of a nation and plant them on top of a mountain and that God would make them to be a noble cedar

[²³ On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest.]

And in that noble cedar, birds of every sort would nest, find their rest, take comfort and shelter and shade

And we talked about what it would look like for us to be a noble cedar kind of a church, where all the birds of Chatham County might take their nest and find their rest

For believers and seekers and cynics and artists and corporate types and blue collar and white collar and Republicans and Democrats and all types of people to come together including Pharisees and tax-collectors!

This is our version of dinner at Matthew's house! This NEW community where we're all being made New together with Jesus at the center of it all!

And the only way it's going to happen is if we're willing to follow Jesus into some places and if we're willing to invite people who aren't really church people to come and see

This is the kind of church we want to be here!

And at the same time, there's also a larger reality that we're a part of Jesus's global church. And the reality is that this new community that Jesus is building, it isn't all on us to demonstrate, it's already happening.

We're a part of Jesus's global church that already looks like that noble cedar, it's just spread out in all kinds of ways

This week, there's a particular opportunity to participate in the larger diversity of the church. Alston Chapel is an historically African-American church in Pittsboro that's hosting a series of revival meetings

They've invited me and our worship team to be a part of it on Thursday night at 7:00.

I want to invite you to join me and some of our worship team folks as we participate in what promises to be a wonderful taste of some of how big the church of Jesus actually is

Details are in the bulletin and up here on the screen, for some of you, this kind of a step is much more risky than going to a party with a bunch of tax collectors and sinners!

Come and join the party where Jesus is at the center of it all

This morning we're seeing how Jesus has come not just to make individuals new but to build a new community—how he crafts a community full of people who wouldn't self-select to be together

And the Wildly Important Take-Home question for you this morning is simply this:
Where to you need to follow Jesus into and through some tension or awkwardness in order to be made new?

For some of you, you identify a little bit more as an **outsider?** to this Jesus community. The tension for some of you is just coming here on a Sunday morning!

Thanks so much for being here, we're glad you're here, **welcome** to continue to explore or wrestle, welcome into the spiritual tension of weighing what it would look like to follow Jesus and be a part of this new community!

And your role might not just be to come yourself and figure this thing, some of you have been some of the most help in **welcoming** other people just like you here!

When I meet someone who's new here and not sure about all of this, sometimes I'll introduce them to someone else who's not sure about all of this but who's been here for a little while

So often, they'll communicate welcome to them in ways that I just can't because I'm the religious guy!

In fact, you might, just like Matthew, be totally positioned to **invite** other people just like to be on this journey with you: how cool would it be if you had companions on your spiritual journey, someone else who you could process your questions with?

Others of us as we're in this type of a community can recognize a **little bit of Pharisee?** in us that we need Jesus to deal with

This week I want to invite my fellow repenting and confessing Pharisees to literally take Jesus's command seriously "***Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'***"

What if this was your prayer refrain for the week? Jesus, teach me what it means that you desire mercy not sacrifice?

Others of us who would identify as **disciples**?, and maybe there's a place that Jesus is leading you that you'd rather not **go** to, are pretty sure it'd be uncomfortable to go there

maybe that's the revival meeting this Thursday night, maybe it's investing more in relationships outside a Christian bubble, maybe it's a sense that you need to serve locally or overseas

Or maybe if you're a disciple, we need to look at Matthew and see how his instinct to **invite** all kinds of people to come and see Jesus, someone that God's put on your heart and in your life to be intentional about inviting

My friends, Jesus has come to introduce a new new that will never grow old, never fall apart, never die, never break, never go away—making us new individually and building a new community, the church

And sometimes we have to follow Jesus into and through the tension or awkwardness in order to be made new.