Hosea 5:15-6:6
Romans 4:13-25
Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

So, this is what I have been thinking about ever since I read today's readings early in the week. When does being healed allow us to hear God's call? When does heeding God's call heal us?

Matthew is a tax collector, one of the most reviled of all occupations in first century Roman society, because their reputation for rarely dealing honestly with those from whom they collected tax, pocketing the excess as a way to enrich themselves. Yet Jesus sees him sitting at the tax booth, and says quite simply, "Follow me."

Something about Matthew's present circumstance led him to get up and go. Perhaps it was a simple as none of us wants to be hated for the work we do, and somehow, we would all rather deal honestly in our work, and Jesus, in that moment, offered Matthew an alternative way of life. Maybe it was something else.

It is unlikely, according to scholars, Matthew the tax collector and Matthew the evangelist is one in the same but what an amazing turn of events, if they were. Here Jesus' call to "follow him" contains all the grace this hated tax collector needed in order to be healed. Does he go own to chronical the story of Jesus as Matthew the evangelist – or does his story become the gospel's foundation? Either way is possible and so we wonder…

Does healing lead to call or does answering God's call bring about healing? Or is this a cycle of God's divine grace?

Following the account of Matthew's call we have two accounts of Jesus' healing, of Jairus' daughter and of the woman suffering from hemorrhages. A little context might help. Obviously, the leader of the synagogue has heard of Jesus. It is early enough in Jesus' ministry that controversy has yet to swirl around him. The woman suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years is clearly suffering. This makes her an outcast from society because she would be considered constantly ritually unclean – meaning she was set apart from family and friends, essentially suffering alone.

Both the leader of the synagogue and the woman suffering from hemorrhages have faith; one overt and one covert. Jesus answered both. Jairus' daughter and the woman were both healed. What happened next? We don't know, but we can imagine. Having experienced Jesus through the healing of his daughter, might Jairus have continued as a faithful follower of Jesus? Unlike Nicodemus, who came to Jesus in the dark, Jairus comes to him openly. Might he, then, have gone on to defend Jesus at his trial much as Nicodemus did. Might he have been even more open about his trust in Jesus, his faith, as Nicodemus, who in the end, carried one hundred pounds of spices through the streets of Jerusalem in order to anoint Jesus' body for burial? Might he have brought others to faith?

Imagine the woman, once cast out from society, returning to family and friends, healed, restored to society. What would she tell them about the man who brought an end to her twelve years of suffering? Might she have brought others to faith?

Does healing lead to deeper faith, trust in Jesus, and a willingness to go where Jesus calls?

Hosea 5:15-6:6
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If we look back for a moment to our reading from the prophet Hosea, we hear a cautionary tale meant for the people of Israel, but applicable to the church, and us, today. The Israelites are in need of healing – their relationship with God is fractured by their behavior, over which God laments. Akin to Amos, who prophesies in the name of God, "What do I desire of you but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly before your God," in Hosea we hear, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." In those days one made a sacrifice, a burnt offering, to acknowledge God, to atone for sin, in praise and thanksgiving. Much as we show up for church on Sunday, pray, praise God, make an offering. Both are considered "right practice" but are either sufficient to maintain a healthy relationship with God? Because they seem rather transactional rather than like the steadfast love God offers us.

Is answering God's call to live in justice, peace, and love, the very thing that will heal our own brokenness and that of the world?

Paul's Letter to the Romans refers to Abraham, who with Sarah, packed their belongings and went out into the wilderness at God's command, leaving family and homeland. Refugees in the name of God. They were old and without descendants, which would have cast them in an unfavorable light in the age in which they lived. Yet, under the oaks of Mamre, when God promised Abraham his descendants would number the stars, Sarah may have laughed, but their trust in God never faded.

Did their faith open their hearts to God's call? Did answering that call lead to healing? Maybe so.

How unlikely a choice, though, for Abraham and Sarah to become the forebears of people of Israel. How unlikely would it seem for Matthew the reviled tax collector to be called by Jesus. I'm sure we all think at some time, "Why would God ever call me to do anything?"

But, God does. In big and small ways. All the time. Every day. One by one boxes of cereal and jars of jam are brought in for the Edgewood-Pawtuxet Food Closet. The list of items needed for today's help bags organized by our Tuesday men's group showed up almost immediately. Six people signed up for EfM in September and that group just finished it's first year. Every week men show up on Tuesday for Bible study. The women show up on Thursday morning. Then there is Monday meditation and Living Stones. All in an effort to learn and grow in faith. You step up in all sorts of ways, answering God's call, whether whispered in your ear, or like a two by four hitting you upside the head. All ways to BE the church, when simply going to church is not enough. And you are healed. Made whole. Made more and more into the person God created you to be each time you do.

When we show up for one another, help and support one another, seek and serve Christ in one another, we are living into the justice, peace, and love that God calls us to. And we are healed in large and small ways.

Maybe healing leads to us able to answer God's call. Maybe answering God's call leads to healing. But I suspect rather than a 'this then a that', it is more of a circle, where call and healing together become the interrelated experience of our loving and merciful God who always desires to deepen

relationship with us, cycling in and through our lives day after day calling us, healing us, and making us whole.