

TV shows can be complicated. Especially those fiddling with the chronology of events. Show begins. Early into the scene words appear 'three days earlier.' A different scene begins. For the regulars, today's Luke reading has that feel about it. We've been feasting on the grand scenes of Jesus' death and resurrection. Now listening to incidents in Jesus' life three years earlier. Adjust your mental screen. We're back in the early stages of Jesus ministry. Dr Luke's careful, investigative writing reveals the real Jesus. For his friend Theophilus and countless readers ever since. To provide certainty about Jesus. Up to this point in **Luke 5**, we see Jesus the unique Son of God. 100% human 100% God. Tempted in every way but not disobeying God. Rejected by those who should know better. We see Jesus, the bearer of transforming grace displaying all the power and authority of God. Declaring and proving he has authority to forgive sins. Luke's conclusion: Jesus is the Messiah. The promised One sent from God. The one devout Jews are waiting for. In **ch 2** we hear about Simeon a devout Jew who, moved by the Spirit, acknowledged the baby Jesus as the Messiah. He is in the minority. The Pharisees and teachers of God's law reject any suggestion Jesus is the Messiah. He doesn't fit the script they take from the Scriptures. Problem is they misread the script. They expect the Messiah to uphold the law and their interpretation of it. To reinstate Israel to a place of glory among the nations. Jesus arrives on the scene: the unscripted Messiah. Causing confusion, anger and distress. He smashes expectations by his words and actions. As we've just heard, he breaks their law. Engaging with broken, needy humanity. Calling Levi, a tax collector to join his team. Eating with tax collectors and sinners. Eating and drinking instead of mournfully fasting. Unscripted. But revealing the heart and purpose of God. Confronting spiritual blindness and self-righteousness. Proclaiming good news to the spiritually poor. The unscripted Messiah calls people no one wants. *'After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.'* **v27-28** Levi despised by fellow Jews and the Romans. Collecting taxes to resource Roman oppression. At the same time corruptly lining his pockets with the hard-earned cash of his countrymen. Jesus adds him to his team. For the Pharisee incomprehensible the Messiah does that. Brothers and sisters, more deeply than we acknowledge many of us feel unworthy, unwanted, rejected, put down, ignored, discarded. At best we live with patchy personal histories. At worst ones darkly

stained. If that is you, the revelation of this passage: Jesus, the unscripted Messiah, who knows your deepest, darkest secrets, wants you, loves you. Offers forgiveness, not condemnation, when you answer his call to follow him. He offers a clean break from your past as you trust him with your present and future. The good news: Jesus sees what you can become on his team. Levi, the tax collector is Matthew, original disciple, evangelist and writer of the first gospel. Heaven is populated by people no one wants. In church gatherings everywhere people carry healed scars of rejection. Because of Jesus' loving, transforming acceptance. Come to him knowing that. How would you describe Northern Beaches Anglicans? A good news church or a religious, comfortable white middle-class club? What is the evidence for your answer? Are modern day tax collectors and sinners however we classify them truly welcome and embraced by grace? How are we engaging with those different from us? Fellowship at our table or arm's length aloofness? How are we showing genuine passion and compassion for the lost? Jesus, the unscripted Messiah sacrifices the sort of religious purity applauded by the Pharisees. Eating with a bunch of sinners who are rebels against the rule of God. Sharing a meal with Levi's mates a deliberate act of identification, fellowship and acceptance. *'Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them.'* **v29** Jesus not only eats with sinners. He dies for them. The ultimate religious impurity. **Galatians 3:13**, *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."* The lengths to which Jesus goes to put you on his team. Jesus, the unscripted Messiah exposes those out of kilter with the heart of God. The Pharisees complain about Jesus. *But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"* **v30** In their heart there is no mercy for the lost. God has a heart for the lost. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. Levi a stark contrast to the Pharisees. He holds a feast for his friends so they meet Jesus. Longing for their conversion. Sisters and brothers, are you a Pharisee or a Levi? Is your heart beating in sync with the heart of God? Do you long for the conversion of others? Are you so convinced of your own righteousness you are blind to your spiritual need? Jesus issues a sobering warning. *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* **v31-32** Those who consider they are spiritually healthy don't see the need for the grace and mercy of the Saviour. Those aware of their

spiritual sickness hear the call of Jesus and follow him. Just like Levi. Finally, Jesus, the unscripted Messiah exposes the joyless solemnity of religiosity. Of which the Pharisees an example. Contrasting it with the joyous celebration of those who recognise his presence with them. In **v34-35** Jesus likens himself to the bridegroom at a wedding feast. His presence brings celebration. The bridegroom's departure changes the mood. An allusion to the grief that will flow when Jesus is taken away to die. For the Christian, Jesus, the bridegroom is with us by his Spirit. He never leaves us. How is joy and celebration seen in your faith? Christians celebrate the new way Jesus brings. A new way not a religious system. In the little parables of **v36-38**, Jesus makes clear he did not come to patch up Judaism. He brings the new life of Christianity with its offer of forgiveness and transformation. You don't patch up the old garment by cutting off parts of the new. You can't contain new wine in old wineskins. The tragedy is many prefer a religious system or a materialistic world view to new life in Christ. They do so refusing to taste the new way. Thinking the old way is better. This is the meaning of Jesus' words in **v39**, *And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'* For the Pharisees, the claim Jesus is the Messiah is unscripted. He doesn't fit the mould. The irony, Jesus the Messiah is entirely scripted. In the pages of the Bible. What script are you reading about Jesus? Your own version or God's? There is nothing to lose and everything to gain by checking out the original script. Written in the Bible. Authenticated in the lives of Jesus' followers. The original script speaks of a Messiah who frees us from the burden of guilt. Satisfies the ache of our souls like no one or nothing else can. Who invites us to leave our past behind and makes it possible to do so. Who offers us the most complete welcome even while we are a work in progress. I am so thankful for the grace and mercy of this Messiah. I trust you are too.