

Key idea: Jesus is the doctor come to deal with the sickness of sin, in line with the promises of God.

1. Is there a doctor in the house?

Donna Leon is one of my favourite detective authors. An American based now in Switzerland, her focus is the city of Venice. Her key character is Commissario Guido Brunetti. He is a genuinely lovely bloke, married to Paola and with two terrific kids. I highly recommend her writing and her books. I reckon they are brilliant in their insights into human nature and society.

Her first Brunetti novel was released nearly 30 years ago – 'Death at La Fenice'. La Fenice is the great opera venue in Venice. At the interval in a key production, the conductor – a world-renowned but not well-loved man – is poisoned by cyanide. As everyone sits down after the interval, a whisper moves through the opera hall, and finally the manager of the production stands on the stage and asks if there is a doctor in the house.

In one sense, it becomes a metaphor for not only the first novel in the Brunetti series, but a metaphor for Venice itself – an increasingly dark and corrupt and decaying city, damaged and broken socially, economically, politically and morally. It is a stock-standard line in many movies and novels – 'Is there a doctor in the house?' – but that doesn't lessen the effect of the metaphor: there is sickness afoot, and what is needed is the doctor.

We live in a world that is obviously sick, at this time. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a sickly pallor over this world, a pallor

we have always sensed but now the sickness is obvious. In all honesty, as I have said a number of times in sermons, I have never met anyone who has said that this world is as good as it gets or that there is NOT something fundamentally broken about our world. I think that we experience this in a slightly sharper way in this neck of the woods, in the bush. We experience this sickness not just in COVID-19 but in drought and fire, on farms and in towns where nothing can really be hidden.

This world needs healing. Humans, as the central figures of this world, need healing. Put simply, we need a doctor – is there a doctor in the house?

PRAY...

Jesus is at work. That seems to be the theme of this chunk of Matthew's gospel, the good news about Jesus. Bookended by Matthew 4:23 and 9:35, this section starts and ends with Jesus preaching, teaching and healing. From the Sermon on the Mount (where we saw the authority of Jesus as the Teacher/Preacher) through to the series of miracles in three-s (showing Jesus as the Saviour, the Healer and God) interspersed with chunks on following Jesus (Jesus is the Lord), this whole section is about Jesus at work. It closes with his second large teaching block, into chapters 11 and 12.

Throughout, we are shown the nature of Jesus as Matthew shows him at work. From this, Matthew wants us to gauge our reaction, how we deal with Jesus as he is. As we meet Jesus as he is – Teacher, Preacher, Saviour, Healer, Lord, God – we come face-

to-face with the one God promised from the family of Abraham to roll back the curse of sin in this world, we come face-to-face with the one God promised from the family of David who would rule the world as God intended. And Matthew wants us to work out how we deal with him.

2. A house-call (vs.9)

Jesus is back in Capernaum, the base of so much of his work.

In three short and sharp miracles – remember that Matthew is showing Jesus at work with three miracle chunks, interspersed with a reflection on following him – he has shown his authority to set the natural right, the supernatural right, the whole human right. He has shown that he is, in essence, God-in-the-flesh.

As Jesus moves about the town, he meets Matthew – **look at verse 9... READ.**

Matthew is sitting at the tax office. We already know – in our climate – our natural hostility to taxes, and paying them. But that is nothing compared to how tax collectors were viewed around Capernaum, in Israel. They were a symbol of invasion and oppression. They were betrayers of the nation. They were people who were instruments of corruption and colonialism. They were participating in a fundamentally unclean occupation. They were outsiders, on every level. They were also extremely wealthy, pragmatic, and ruthless.

Matthew is sitting at the tax office. Jesus approaches him. Jesus commands him – 'Follow me!'

Remember that historical present we talked about two weeks ago – how Matthew uses language to bring ideas and words and actions to the forefront of his narrative? This is one of those moments. Jesus commands. Matthew follows.

Jesus' command is very clear. It is not ambiguous – to follow is to 'follow me'. It is not negotiable. It is not open to interpretation. It is not dependent on a set of sub-clauses or appendices or conditions. There are no alternative routes or teachers or leaders. Jesus says, 'Follow me'.

Remember what we talked about two weeks ago? Jesus defines what it means to follow him. And this is an example of Jesus defining what it means to follow him. But it is even more than that, as we will soon see. Did you notice that Jesus initiates the call? Did you see that Jesus found Matthew, not Matthew searching for him? Did you see that Jesus commands, and Matthew obeys?

There is the template for following Jesus. Just as we learned two weeks ago, Jesus is Lord – he defines what it means to follow him. When he says, 'Follow me', you follow him. And Matthew is a living, breathing example of that template.

3. The doctor is in the house (vs.10-13)

There is immediate joy here – remember that Matthew himself is writing this account. A tax collector, an outsider, an outcast, becomes one of the four key biographers of Jesus! Matthew himself understood the grand transformation that those words – 'Follow me' – had wrought. He threw a banquet – **look at verse 10... READ.**

Matthew himself doesn't record where the banquet meal is, nor does he seem to record a reason for Jesus having this meal. Luke, in his account (5:29), makes these details clearer (as does Mark, in 2:14-22). Matthew has thrown a banquet. It is joyous. It is attended by people from Matthew's previous social class – 'many tax collectors and sinners came as guests to eat'.

There is unmistakable joy here. Matthew invites Jesus, and presumably his disciples, to join in a meal with Matthew's other social network – the sinners. It is a joyous mixing of social networks. It is not hard to see Matthew as desiring his 'other friends' to meet Jesus and be transformed, just as he was. It is not hard to see in Matthew another example of Jesus setting the whole person aright, just as has been seen in the paralytic. What a wonderful moment! What a wonderful image! An outsider brought in, a man set right!

Just as at the Gadarenes, there are some who are not comfortable with Jesus being 'here' – **look at verse 11... READ.**

The Pharisees are puzzled – they ask a question of Jesus' disciples. They have heard the rumour, heard of the banquet (after all, they were not invited and, even if they had been, they would not have attended!), and they are puzzled: 'What is Jesus doing hanging out, eating with, sinners?'

In essence, these religious leaders were asking why Jesus spent time sharing food with bad people. There were certain people that

you associated with, and those bad people were not socially nor religiously acceptable. What was Jesus doing?

The question is conveyed to Jesus. He replies – **look at verses 12-13... READ.**

Jesus makes an observation. In fact, he uses a well-known colloquialism. It is a truth we are familiar with – sick people need a doctor, healthy people don't need a doctor.

The Pharisees would have nodded their heads at this. After all, they would agree with such a truth. And the connection Jesus is making is unavoidable: sinners are sick!

Let me pause there and tease that idea out a little. Sin is the attitude and action that says, 'I am God and God is not' (REPEAT). It is the virus that has broken this world. Remember our series on Genesis last year, as we looked at Adam and Eve and the way in which their sin led to the global pandemic, that has never ended, that has no vaccine developed in a laboratory, that is passed on by nature of humanity into every generation and every human? This world is broken by sin. All humans are sick with sin. And Jesus is making the unavoidable connection: the sinful person needs help, a doctor.

Jesus gives a rebuke. He speaks directly to the Pharisees, in the language of the schools they know, and he confronts their complete inability to know the God they say they represent. Quoting from Hosea – an Old Testament messenger from God (a prophet) who was speaking to God's people – he commands

them to examine the desire of God. If they claim to represent God, then surely they know what God desires?

The quote from Hosea is brutal in its exposure. Hosea was speaking to God's people who looked good on the outside – they never missed a religious activity – but who were rotten in their hearts, being abusive and selfish economically, socially, politically and relationally. They had created a performance-based religious life which they used to hide their hearts.

God, their God, the God they were meant to represent to the world, was not like that at all. God knows the heart of every human, and so God knows that no performance by a human will deal with the sickness of sin – it will just express it! God's desire was not performance but mercy – giving to sinners what they would not earn, deserve or achieve. This is how God had always operated – remember his action in the face of Adam and Eve's rebellion, with Noah, as he sought Abraham, as he dealt with David? God committed himself to dealing with sin for humans, through the family of Abraham – he committed himself to displaying mercy to humans who deserved none of it. And God's people were meant to represent this desire to the world, to know this desire themselves, to display this desire to those around them.

These religious leaders did not know this God. These religious leaders did not desire mercy. These religious leaders loved their key performance indicators. These religious leaders completely ostracized anyone who wasn't good enough for them.

Jesus makes a conclusion. As the one Matthew has clearly identified as the one promised by God to deal with sin in this world, Jesus confirms this truth – he has come to deal with sinners. Jesus is the culmination of God's promise and God's desire – that mercy be extended to sinners.

At this conclusion, you can glance back at Matthew and put three and two together. Matthew was a sinner. Jesus had come to deal with him, to call him. Jesus did deal with him and call him. Matthew was made whole again. The doctor had made a house-call, and Matthew was made one of God's people.

However, Jesus' words have a sting in them, a sting that we hope the religious leaders heard. You see, if you read Hosea 6 carefully – the place from which Jesus quoted – the key truth that condemns these men, as it did their ancestors, was that they did not know God. This meant they did not know themselves. This meant they did not display God. Ironically, in a tragic way, this meant they were the very people that they rejected as 'unworthy' – they were sinners. In not knowing God, they displayed their sickness. If they had listened, they would have seen that they needed Jesus just as much as the tax collectors!

In truth, Jesus is stating very clearly that he has come to deal with all people, because all people are sinners – tax collectors and the religiously active. If you are a human, you are a sinner. If you are a human, you have the virus of sin in your nature. If you are human, you have been struck down by this pandemic of sin. If you are a human, you need Jesus, the doctor who has come to deal with sin.

Before we go further, I want to pause there to make sure we have grasped who Jesus is here, and what that means for us.

Jesus is the one God promised would come to deal with human sin. Jesus is the one God promised would come to deal with the fundamentally broken nature of our world, the fundamentally broken nature of ourselves, by dealing with our sickness – sin.

Jesus didn't come to deal with religious people. Jesus didn't come to call good people. Jesus didn't come to deal with those with the right family trees (after all, look at his!), the right skin colour, the right education, the right employment history, the best-behaved kids. Jesus came to deal with sinners, which is humans, which is every person, which is you and me. And he came to heal us of that sickness that has broken each of us and each fibre of this world.

Do you know this Jesus?

Even more than this, do you know that you need this Jesus?

If you are a human being, you are in desperate need of Jesus. You have the sickness of sin, and you need Jesus. You need the doctor who deals with the very thing that has made you broken, that has broken this world – regardless of how good, educated, employed, dysfunctional, bad, old or young – you need Jesus.

How Jesus does this is gradually made clear, but this much is clear: Jesus has come to deal with the sickness of sin and, if you are a human being, you are terribly sick and need him.

Do you know this Jesus?

In this sense, I am speaking to those who have come to Jesus, had their sins forgiven, and been made aright – just like Matthew. If you know this Jesus, then his command to Matthew – 'Follow me' – applies equally to you. When we follow Jesus, we follow Jesus. There is no need for a second opinion. There is no call for skepticism, for seeking another view via Google or Wikipedia. When you follow Jesus, he sets the agenda, he defines what it means to follow him.

Matthew displayed this as he held his banquet – he invited the sinners to come and meet this man. Do you know Jesus? Then you share his desire, his concern, his focus – mercy for the sinner, and that means anyone. Do you know Jesus? Is your heart like his – after mercy for the sinner? Or, has it atrophied into the desire for goodness and right behaviour and the right family tree and skin colour, a decent employment record and friendship network, before Jesus is offered?

4. The doctor is in the house (vs.14-17)

This Jesus – Jesus as he really is – can sometimes be hard to grasp, even fit into our understanding of the world. That is nothing new – **look at verse 14... READ.**

The followers of John the Baptist, and the Pharisees, look at Jesus, and they scratch their heads. They ask, 'How does this bloke fit into our established ways of doing religion?'

They pick one of the same 'acts of righteousness' that Jesus dealt with in Matthew 6. Jesus' words there, and in Matthew 5:20, should caution us against thinking in certain ways about Jesus' answer – **look at verses 15-17... READ.**

Given what Jesus has just said in the Sermon on the Mount, we must make sure we understand what he is NOT saying: he is NOT saying that he has come with a brand new way of relating to God, nor has he come to do away with religion, nor has he come to create a new religion, or establish an opposition to the whole Old Testament.

So, what is he saying?

Well, he uses three images that work all together. The key one is the first one.

Fasting was something God's people were commanded to do once a year, when they gathered as God's mob to confess their sin. It was a statement of sorrowful dependence upon God, a statement of mourning at the state of humanity, a cry for God to do as he had promised – to deal once and for all with sin through Abraham's family. It was a religious act that displayed a dependence upon God to do as he promised – deal with sin

So, I think Jesus is stating, why would you fast when what you hoped for has come? That is the way weddings work – when the day comes, all the waiting is over – throw yourself into enjoying the time of fulfilment.

Jesus is here – the moment that God had promised has come. Why would you fast when that moment has come?

Put simply, Jesus is reminding those listening – just as he had back in Matthew 6 – to get your religion, and the deeds that rightly go with it – in the right context.

Moreover, it is bigger than anything these humans have created based on their understanding of God's word. Leon Morris puts it most clearly when he says that Jesus is not repudiating Scripture (what God has revealed in the Old Testament), but he is repudiating 'the current religious practices allegedly based on Scripture' (p.226).

In this sense, Jesus is not here to conform to their religious constructions. What God had promised, what God had prepared for, what God had said was coming – it is here! The descendant of Abraham who would roll back sin – he is here! The doctor IS IN the house – what a day!

This is the right context for understanding your religious behaviour. It means that all those religious acts – which pointed to this day – need to be understood in the light of the doctor being here to deal with our sickness.

Do you know this Jesus?

If you don't, then please come and know him – there is no other way to deal with your fundamental brokenness as a human being.

If you do know Jesus, then rejoice that he has come and that you are made whole. Rejoice and live out your religious deeds in light of him – perhaps even fast now, as a sign that you are depending upon God to send his king back to bring all things to their final climax.

As you wait, please do a Matthew – introduce sinners to Jesus. By that, I mean, introduce any human being to Jesus – and introduce him as he truly is. The doctor, after all, is in the house.