

The thing is, I wonder if any of us really know what it is to be thoroughly converted. What it is to be going completely one way, and then stop and go in the exact opposite direction. What it is to set aside everything for which we've dreamed and worked and saved and planned, and to go and do something completely different. I wonder if, really, we're a mixture of old and new, good and bad, trying to shape it and sort it so that we're on the right side of the line. I wonder if most of us are really going at this Christian life bit by bit, two steps forward and a step back, hoping that, when we take stock we can demonstrate that we've made some progress.

If I'm honest I'm quite envious of someone like Matthew. Everyone knew what he had been like, and therefore what a difference Jesus had made in his life. We all know about tax collectors in the Bible. They did a necessary job: taxes help society when used well, and in themselves they are not evil. But the biblical tax collectors added their personal touch, using the force of law and the authority of the state to line their own pockets as well. Matthew, or Levi in the other gospels, did this like any other, and was loathed as a result. Tax collectors personified what today's collect called "the selfish pursuit of gain and the possessive love of riches". They were a byword for everything that was corrupt and bad and loathsome, and they knew it. Perhaps they even revelled in it. 'No one likes us. We don't care'.

The way Matthew tells it, he's in his booth being loathsome and corrupt. Jesus walks past. Jesus has already gained a reputation for being powerful and charismatic and challenging and divinely inspired. He'd healed loads of people, cleansed people of leprosy, helped a paralysed man to walk, rid people of evil things which had taken them over. He'd even changed the weather. These were close knit communities. People talked, quicker than we tweet now. No one, least of all Matthew would have been in any doubt as to who this was and what he stood for. Two words to Matthew. 'Follow me'. And that's it. He does.

That's why I'm envious. Because, the way it's told, Matthew is one thing and then immediately he's another. Old life: gone. I guess it would have to be: he was so obviously doing the wrong thing that any hint of doing it again and he would have been out on his ear, even self condemned. If he was going to follow Jesus it would be all or nothing. And it was all. Not only does he get to be one of the twelve, he gets to write it all down, so that he's both an Apostle, one of those who could recount the words of Jesus and he's an evangelist: a writer of the Good News, so that we can still hear his words today.

And, perhaps because he's conscious of all the harm he has done his own people, the Jews he has a special concern for them in his Gospel. Remember how Zaccheus makes recompense by repaying what he's taken many times over? I wonder if Matthew, aware of all that he has taken from his own people, ensures that he gives them the most precious thing that he can: an account of the faith in Christ which turned his life round and gave him hope. Read through Matthew's Gospel – I dare you – and count the number of times he quotes the Hebrew Scriptures and shows how Jesus fulfils them. From wherever you are, he says, Jesus can and will be your Messiah, your Saviour, your hope and your light.

I'm envious because this shines a very clear light on the murkiness and complexity of my discipleship. I can point to a moment when I knew I made a decision for Christ. That came

after a lifetime – 15 years – of church attendance. I was never very bad, and then and now have had no public reputation for going the wrong way or doing the wrong thing. My day to day life didn't have to change very much, and, though pleased, no one was very much surprised when I followed a call to be ordained. I didn't have to turn round from very much, and that means I have to look very carefully to check what a difference following Christ is making today.

Reflecting on the call of Matthew, crystal clear as it is, is like holding up a mirror – one of those dressing room mirrors with lights on it. Matthew's is what a 100% conversion looks like. What does yours? What, for example, has following Jesus done to your attitude to money? Do you still, really, put more store by it than your heavenly treasure? What about your attitude to other people? Are they all there to be served, to be loved, or are some of them to be swept out of the way, dominated and defeated? What about your reputation, the things which mark you out as successful, your ambitions? Where are they when faced with the two simple words Matthew heard: follow me?

And if you want my honest answer: none of my responses to those questions will be as clear as Matthew's. I know I could have been something else rather than a Vicar, but I have to say that my last three roles have meant living in three very nice places. I know as a Vicar I am the target for all sorts of stuff other people avoid – last night I was walking the dog up Toll Gavel, when a hooded young person in Subway saw my clerical shirt, looked me straight in the eye, leered and stick his middle finger up. I don't think it was a cheery greeting. And sometimes you get worse abuse in the church, not out of it. But no one can tell me that my life is harder than anyone else's in a complex employment situation. And this is no sacrifice compared to the lot of some Christians across the world.

I want to secure my finances as much as the next person. I'm as defined by my possessions as much as anyone else. Ask me how pleased I was when I bought a guitar I've wanted for 30 years. I care about my position and what people think about me, and if I had to weigh that up against what I want people to think about the Jesus I serve, there might be a slimmer majority than for the Scottish referendum.

Matthew shows me that my conversion is still happening. And I bet yours is too. Yes, I follow Christ. I sometimes wear clothes which make that so clear that people can tell me what they think of it. And yes, I'm still working out what that means. My emotions, and my finances, and my intellect and my relationships are all still listening to Jesus's words, and trying to make sense of them. Thanks be to God that when we're with Jesus we are truly with him, right from the start. After Matthew's call there's a big dinner, and all sorts of dodgy types are there. Far from them dragging Jesus down, he raises them up. That's us: with him we are made new.

And then we have to work out what that means. I will follow. And I'll help you if you help me. Amen.