

June 11, 2023
Second Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 9:9–13

JESUS IS THE DOCTOR FOR THE SICK AND THE DYING

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

In our Gospel text this morning, the Holy Spirit inspires St Matthew to tell his own personal story of coming to faith in Jesus. Matthew is listed as one of the twelve original disciples in all three synoptic Gospels, but it is only in his own Gospel that he is called “**Matthew the tax collector.**” (Matthew 10:2–4; cf: Mark 3:16–19; Luke 6:14–16) It seems that the Holy Spirit wanted you and me all who read Matthew’s Gospel that Jesus called Matthew out from the dregs of society and placed him into God’s eternal kingdom. For Jesus does not call only one tax collector, but many tax collectors and sinners of every stripe such as you and me to follow Him in faith and service unto eternal life.

You could say that Matthew was an IRS agent of his day. “*Yeah, he’s the tax man!*” He was a Jew hired by the Roman government to collect a variety of taxes, which he return an agreed amount of the taxes back to the government. But in that day, many a tax man collected far more than required, extorting from the locals to line their own pockets. Tax collectors were despised by their own people and regarded as crooked sinners which is why **tax collectors and sinners** are often lumped together in the Bible.

Scripture does not tell us when Matthew first heard the teachings of Jesus. What it does say is that Matthew did not choose Jesus, but Jesus chose Matthew. (cf: John 15:16) As Matthew describes it: He writes:

“... Jesus... saw [him] sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed him.” (Matthew 9:9)

God always makes the first move, and oftentimes His move is also always contrary to human wisdom. (cf: 1 Corinthians 1:25) Instead of calling a wise and scholarly rabbi or a pious Jew, Jesus calls a man who was a leech on society, a despicable tax collector into a life of faith, trust, and discipleship – and Matthew followed. But Matthew was not the only scoundrel that Jesus called that day. Matthew says:

“... as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.” (Matthew 9:10)

Many tax collectors and sinners, lowlifes and miscreants of all parties and persuasions gathered to recline at the table with Jesus to listen to Him. The Pharisees do not understand. Why would a rabbi, a teacher, this Jesus, lower Himself to recline with those of ill repute? Why would He have

table fellowship with the riffraff and the rubbish? In replying to the Pharisees, Jesus exposes their hypocrisy, saying:

“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9:12–13)

It is an easy illustration to understand, comparing sinners to sick people and Jesus to a physician. The Pharisees considered themselves among the well, and the tax collectors and sinners among the sick. Jesus came to seek and save the lost. (cf: Luke 19:10) He came to rescue the harassed, the helpless, and the hopeless. The truly righteous have no need of a Savior – but those dead in sin and trespasses do. The tax collectors and sinners were not looking for a free lunch. They were not hoping to hear words of human wisdom and philosophy. They were being fed the lifesaving salve of Jesus’ Gospel and His medicinal words of eternal life. As all good teachers do, Jesus gives the Pharisees a homework assignment. He quotes the prophet Hosea saying:

“Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’” (Matthew 9:13)

The Pharisees are not only scholars of the Old Testament Law, they are also well versed in the writings of God’s prophets. They know that God called Hosea to preach against Israel’s idolatry and unfaithfulness, and call them to repentance. This mercy that God speaks of through Hosea means ***loyalty, steadfast love, and abundant kindness.*** (cf: BDB Hebrew Lexicon, 338–339)

While God had commanded burnt offerings and sacrifices, they were only pleasing to Him if they were offered with a loving and compassionate heart. The fact is – God does not need their offerings and sacrifices any more than He needs yours. Every beast of the forest is His, as are all the cattle on a thousand hills. (cf: Psalm 50:10) What God desires is faith, trust, and loving obedience. He desires that you love Him with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. He desires that you acknowledge His love and trust in Him above all things.

These Pharisees had a “holier-than-thou” attitude. They delighted in their own efforts in keeping the letter of the Law while pointing out everyone else’s failures. They were blind to their sins of pride, prejudice, and position in society. They did not recognize that they were no different than the tax collectors and sinners who were reclining with Jesus. They were no different than you and me.

You see, everyone is sick. We are all dying from the spiritual disease of sin. You and I are no better than the tax collectors and sinners reclining with Jesus. Truth be told, you and I, many times, are the Pharisees, picking and choosing who needs a physician and who does not. You pick and choose whose sins are worse than others. You become blind to your sins of pride, prejudice, self-righteousness, and position as parishioner or neighbor.

Christ Jesus calls all sinners to Himself, regardless of stripe, and promises them refreshment and mercy. His calling Matthew to discipleship is a picture for every Christian to leave their sinful desires behind and follow Him. Matthew’s calling is picture of your calling. Just as He called Matthew out of his sinful life and into faith and service, God called the Old Testament patriarch

Abraham out paganism and idolatry and made him a promise. A promise to multiply His descendants and to bless all nations through him. (cf: Genesis 12:1–3, 15:3–6) It was not merely a promise of temporal blessings, but the promise of the Gospel that, in Christ Jesus, Abraham's offspring, the people of all nations and times might have forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. Abraham believed and God counted it to him as righteousness. (cf: Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:22)

Abraham trusted in God's promises again and again and – even when year after year it looked like there was no reason to have any trust and confidence. He could have easily given up on the promise and went his own way. He was about 100 years old and as good as dead. And his wife Sarah was barren and way past the age of fertility. (cf: Romans 4:19) Yet Abraham continued to trust in God's promise. St Paul says that:

“In hope [Abraham] believed against hope...” (Romans 4:18)

... meaning, in the face of what appeared contrary to or against any human expectation, Abraham believed. Paul says that Abraham:

“... grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.” (Romans 4:20–21)

As we look around our country and world today, there is an awful lot that might convince us that we should not have any hope. Many people, Christian people, live in fear because when they look around it does not look like God's promises of love and mercy are true. What might the Supreme Court or the government do next? How much more perversion will society force feed upon us and our children? How many more false gods and idols will they demand we bow down to and worship? People are afraid. It is not a fear of God that produces repentance and confidence in God's forgiveness but fear that all in which we hope is not going to come true.

When Abraham was good as dead and Sarah was old and haggard, Abraham believed. He was fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. (cf: Romans 4:21) But the point of our epistle text is not that Abraham had more faith than everybody else. No. The point is that that God is not only ***powerful to do*** as He promises, He ***always does what*** He promises – and – He ***creates*** the very confidence, faith, and trust in you and me just as He created in Abraham and Matthew so that you are able to receive those promises as real and true.

So what are you and I, disciples of Christ to do? As always, the very first thing you and I do is:

“... repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:15)

Repent and receive the Absolution, believing as if Christ were dealing with you Himself.

I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

As disciples of Christ Jesus you are called to be salt and light in this darkened and unsavory world. He calls you to point to God the Father as the One who keeps His promises that He Himself has made and that He will do for you exactly as He did for Abraham and Matthew, making you an heir of His heavenly kingdom. He promises that nothing will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. (cf: Romans 8:35) His word is sure and certain and in

His Word of promise there is hope. Not hope as the world hopes, like hoping it will rain or that your favorite team will win. No. Christian hope is resting assured in Christ and Him crucified for you – that He has won for you forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation. Right now, you have the joy of His salvation, that He loved you unto death on the cross so that you live with Him eternally.

Abraham could have given up all hope thinking all was lost. Matthew was just one among many sin-sick tax collectors and sinners in need of the Great Physician. So God kept His promise by sending a Savior, His only begotten Son, the great spiritual Physician whose business is to deal with the spiritually sick in order to save them. He calls sinners to faith and discipleship, desiring love and devotion toward God and neighbor. Only faith can accept His promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

God took the initiative. He made first move and called sinners such as you and me to be His children and disciples. He drowned your old sinful Adam and called you His own in the waters of Baptism where He gave you the gift of the Holy Spirit so that you might trust in His promises. It was at the font that for the sake of Jesus, you were credited with the entire work of Jesus' suffering and death on the cross, atoning for your sin. It was there that Christ covered your ugly sinfulness with the robe of His righteousness.

Christ Jesus is the great Physician and He has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. By Word and Sacrament He feeds you lifesaving salve of His Gospel and His medicinal words of forgiveness and eternal life. In Christ there is hope and salvation.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.