

Sermon 1605

Matthew 9.9-13

June 25, 2017

I like the Matthew in the Bible. Even named one of my sons after him! The Matthew in the Bible loved Jesus so much and loved his gang so much, he couldn't bear to think that they would go to hell just because they never had a chance to meet Jesus. So the Holy Spirit fingered him to write the Gospel as only a Jew writing for a Jew could. He told the life of Jesus and when Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled, Matthew came out and said it, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet (22)." But his love for his gang showed almost from the start. He threw his own going away party when he became a disciple of Jesus and invited all his lay-about friends. That's the only way they were going to get to meet Jesus. Free drinks and food! Oh, and you'll meet my Jesus.

Matthew was like a guy whose surgeon saved his life after he was carted into the hospital from a terrible accident.

The Healed Know the Best Doctors

1. They know sin's answer.
2. They give recommendations.

"As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him (9)."

Let's clear up a couple of misconceptions. This was not the first time Matthew had seen Jesus. Matthew had gone down to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. He was there the day Jesus was baptized. He saw it. He was with the Twelve when they travelled with Jesus from the Jordan north, so he was at the wedding of Cana and he saw Jesus turn the water into fine, fine wine. So it wasn't some stranger coming out of the blue up to his tax booth and telling him to quit this stinking job and sign on with Jesus Incorporated. Jesus now was asking Matthew to be his full-time follower. It's the difference between being a Sunday school teacher, attending the pastor's monthly staff meetings and hearing him lay out the Law and Gospel angle of the stories as well as some pitfalls to avoid, and enrolling full-time at the Seminary to prepare for the preaching ministry.

And the other misconception is that this was Saint Matthew. At this time Matthew was not considered a saint by any means. He had been excommunicated from the synagogue, thrown out of church! And his horrible sin? No sexual infidelities, no addictions. He was working with the hated Romans as a tax collector and that meant, in the rabbinical mind, he was a traitor and a thief. Out with him! I'm sure the rabbis in Capernaum passed by Matthew's tax booth a couple times a week and every time they passed Matthew they said, "Don't even bother coming to synagogue this Sabbath, because you are going to hell. You are damned, Matthew. No hope for you, Matthew."

Hear this often enough and you start to believe it. Oh, not what they were peddling, as if wearing a red tie in a blue state was a sin or wearing a blue tie in a red state was damnable. No, Matthew knew what a debt of sin he and all people had. There was real sin out there in the world and real sin right here in the inner world, inside Matthew's heart and inside our hearts. Why is it that the morning after an unresolved squabble with the wife or kids we feel terrible, but act like nothing is the matter? And the normal conversations people who love each other have in the morning over breakfast or getting ready for school or work, they just don't happen? That's because of sin. It has caused a rift in our relationship. Why is it that our conscience bothers us, even when we haven't hurt anyone and nobody knows what we did? It's because of sin. Our conscience is telling us God knows and what we have done is a sin against God. Matthew knew that and you and I know that. Our world is full of people pointing out what is wrong. It doesn't take a genius to get to the root of all those spiritual aches and pains in this world. Man does not recognize God as God and, because he cannot love and put his trust in God, he cannot show unselfish love to his fellow human beings, even the ones who share his house and bed with him.

Matthew knew he was a sinner, but he knew sin's answer--Jesus. Look at Jesus' words to the Pharisees at the end of our text. "On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners (12-13).'"

Jesus came to call sinners. To what? A beating? Maybe that's what most non-religious people think goes on in a church during services. You come in and basically are told to take your beating like a man. "Look at what you did, so here's your punishment. You'll be a better person for it afterwards." All I know is one time when I was a kid I did something so far beyond the beyond that my mother, never shy to spank me, didn't trust herself. "Just you wait 'till your father comes home! He'll take care of you!" I didn't wait. I was sort of hoping he'd have to work overtime and maybe not come home for a few days.

No, when Jesus calls sinners he calls us with the Gospel. Hey, isn't that what we learned in our Catechism memorizations? "But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith (The Creed: Explanation to the Third Article)." God calls us and wins us over by telling us of his love. Jesus, the one calling Matthew, was the Savior who would take away the sins of the world. Jesus, the one calling Matthew, was the one whose perfect life would be credited to every believer's account. Jesus, the one calling Matthew, was the reason you will live forever in heaven.

And the guilt, and the shame, and the fear and the just plain feeling lost, lost, so lost, it goes away. I'm not saying it disappears, because sometimes our sinful human nature and the devil really have a hold on us and it's going to take some time to work through it. It took Peter almost 40 days to get over his three-fold denial of Jesus and how Jesus had still forgiven him and restored him to his position of leadership among the Apostles. Matthew knew that. Matthew trusted that. I hope you do, too. It's the only thing we have going for us, for without the Gospel, everything has to keep getting worse and worse and worse.

The healed know the best doctors. Matthew knew sin's answer--his Savior.

The healed know the best doctors. They give recommendations.

Why in the world did this incident take place to begin with? Because Matthew threw his own going away party. Why? He had a big business expense account to blow through? Nope. Guys on the low end of the totem pole get zilch and sitting out in the sun in a decrepit tax collector's booth is the low end of the totem pole. Matthew went to the expense of throwing his own going away party because he wanted his friends to meet Jesus. And it worked!

“While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and ‘sinners’ came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisee saw this, they asked his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and “sinners” (10-11)?”

Matthew had invited them and they had come. Matthew had wanted them to hear Jesus and they were eating and drinking with him, listening to the dinner conversation he was leading, a conversation undoubtedly about forgiveness and faith, a conversation about God's promises made through the generations finally being fulfilled in their day. Matthew had wanted them to see the rest of the disciples, too, so they would know that it wasn't just Jesus who was exceptional. The followers of Jesus were different, too. They didn't fit the mold of religious people. Not a one of them jumped up and down and shouted hallelujah, while trying to get out of a chore because of some imagined religious duty they had to perform. Not a one of them looked down their nose at them, because, as far as they could tell, every one of Jesus' disciples were considered to be nobodies by those who had their names on donor plaques on the synagogue walls. Not a one of them seemed to be the sort who would starch their underwear.

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Pastor Kolander was a little discouraged after Vacation Bible School. We got no new prospects. None of the worshipers last Sunday were first-time visitors or if they were, they didn't fill out a yellow card, those Worshiper's Register cards. Hey, you can help by always filling one out. If a visitor sitting in the pew sees you not filling one out, why should he? Be cool enough to create a little peer pressure for Jesus. Like Pastor Kolander, I wasn't happy but it wasn't the end of the world. We

also run Vacation Bible School for our own children and members. There were a lot of children at our VBS who weren't members. I can't imagine they were all members of some other church, making the VBS rounds. But there are other ways to spread the Gospel. You can recommend. I'll say it again. You can recommend.

You don't know how powerful a force personal recommendations are. Because of a pastor in town, I am alive today. He recommended his cardiologist to me, a man who was so passive and immovable that he kept ordering tests for me until I finally failed one in epic fashion and he kept taking the shade I cast his way. Websites run on personal recommendations. Yelp. No one under 30 goes to a restaurant without looking at the Yelp reviews. If you are 62 and looking at Yelp reviews, it just proves you are lying about your age! Vacation rentals and ride sharing throw personal recommendations in and will help you get a ride or a rental in the future if you are nice and insightful.

So why shouldn't that work for Green Valley Evangelical Lutheran Church? Why shouldn't that work for Green Valley Lutheran Preschool and Kindergarten? If people are all in a tizzy because they just got accepted by this or that exclusive charter school—and why is this or that charter school exclusive?—because they say they are! Why is this VIP program so wonderful? Because the company spokesman says it is! Why is this handful of square houses on lots clawed out of the rock so luxurious? Because that's what the brochure says! C'mon. If that's the case, the Barnum and Bailey Circus closed just a few weeks too soon, there's so many gullible people around.

Why shouldn't personal recommendation work for us? Look what you have received here. Let's just look at the earthly blessings for a moment. Pastors who know your name and have been in your homes. They care for you and show it by their work ethic. Called teachers who have so touched the lives of your children with the message of Jesus that teens this month were singing the Kindergarten graduation songs and reminiscing about the parts they played in their Kindergarten programs. You have a Kindergarten teacher who talked about her retirement in terms of trauma, she was so sad to retire. And it felt like death to a lot of us. Where can you get that in this world of what have you done for me lately? Where can you get that in a world that is unwilling to make a long-term investment in you personally if you in the short-term make the institution look bad?

Why shouldn't personal recommendations work for us? Now look at the surpassingly great heavenly blessings we enjoy. You are going to live in heaven with Jesus one day because of the message you have heard in this church. You are going to stay firm in your faith to the end, you are going to be that house the wise builder built, because the Holy Spirit is going to make you stand through constant strengthening and feeding in the Word which goes on in this Green Valley Evangelical Lutheran congregation. Yes, we are each in our own way clumsy lug-nuts. Being a member here is like going to a junior high dance. You will get your

toes stepped on. It's because we're so bad at loving each other freely from the heart. We're really lousy at truly walking in your shoes. That doesn't come naturally to sinful human beings. But we are trying. We are trying because we love Jesus so much we love you, too. That's why we are so close to one another. But it doesn't come naturally. So forgive us for these irritations, hurts and bruises. It is the hazard of love.

Matthew knew that. Matthew sensed he would see things that would break his own heart and yet hold the promise to heal his world. He would see his Lord, his Savior and Friend, put to death on a cross. But he would also see him alive again, risen from the dead, victorious over every power, authority and dominion. He recommended fellow sinners to Jesus when he invited his friends to his own going away party. He is still inviting fellow sinners to Jesus through the words of his Gospel which will last as long as this world does.

Talk this church and school up to people you know, people you know have a need for a Savior which is not being met by their Sunday morning baseball practices and their Saturday evening drinking bouts. Got a lot of for sale signs in the neighborhood? Look forward to the day those homes will again be filled with new families for you to get to know and find out if they know who Jesus is. And if they don't?

This church is for sinners, because our Savior has come to call sinners to repentance and life everlasting. I know, because that's what he did for me.

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Our Lord delights in showing mercy and seeing that mercy reflected in the lives of his people. That is more important than offerings. That is more important than sacrifices. Matthew knew that. He wrote about it. He showed it. We do, too.