

The Third Sunday after Pentecost

July 3, 2011

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 9:9-13

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. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" 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." (NIV)

You can learn a lot from a mission statement. A mission statement is meant to give a clear and precise picture of the reason something exists. It reveals goals and purposes. For example on this 4th of July weekend, as we give thanks for our country, we might review the purpose of our nation by reading the mission statement of the United States of America. It states: *"We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity do."* If you caught them all, there are 6 goals or purposes we the people of the United States have in this mission statement.

Churches too will form mission statements. I am not going to give you these church's names but I looked up several mission statements. One church says its purpose is: *To be a compassionate & diverse team that encourages and equips fellow believers for the purpose of demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ to our local and global communities.* It is pretty clear that they have a mission to love people, to help people, and to serve people with compassion.

Another church in a larger metropolitan city has this for a mission statement: *Seeking the peace and prosperity of the city.* They also believe the purpose of the Gospel is to *"change the minds, hearts and inmost motives of believers & creates a community in which believers are no longer controlled by material goods or worldly status but instead have solidarity with others across customary social barriers."* While a bit cloudy & confusing, the mission statement of this church sets a goal of breaking down all social barriers, and a purpose of getting everyone to work together to make a better city and community in which to live.

Since any visible church on earth is Christ's church, it would be wise to listen to what Christ has to say for His Church before forming any mission statement, wouldn't it? We will certainly want to understand Jesus' mission on earth. This is exactly what we get in a very clear and precise picture today. Jesus' states His goal. Listen to God's Word this morning as: **Jesus Makes a Mission Statement!**

In this five verse autobiography of Matthew, Jesus is actively and faithfully carrying out His mission. In the city of Capernaun, the home base for Jesus' ministry, Jesus *"saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he*

told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.” Mathew who is also called Levi, Matthew whose name means “*Gift of God*,” is called to follow Jesus. This is something that had to cause some eye rolling and heads to turn. Why? Matthew was a tax collector. That meant he worked for the enemy. Tax collectors were Roman lackeys who after collecting a fixed amount for them, would often collect way beyond that amount of money to keep for themselves. Jews regarded them as traitors and liars, as the vilest of sinners. In fact, tax collectors were barred from the synagogue and were forbidden to have any religious or social contact with respectable Jews. So again when Jesus calls Matthew to follow Him, I would imagine a few heads turned and some eyes rolled.

Yet, Jesus calls this tax collector, and Matthew gets up and follows Jesus. Luke adds that Matthew left everything to follow Jesus. He left his home, his work, his friends, his money, his lucrative position, all because Jesus said, “**Follow me.**” What a wise choice for Jesus was offering so much more! This man whose work was extorting money from others would now receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life as a free gift of God, as the name Matthew means. He would be Jesus’ disciple, and then apostle, and would offer these gifts of God to others.

Matthew wastes no time. He begins serving God by doing a little friendship evangelism. He invites coworkers and others, a bunch of people, to his house to meet and have dinner with Jesus. Matthew realizes that Jesus is not there for just him alone. Next we have what leads Jesus to make a mission statement. Jesus tells us precisely why He came and what He was doing. The Pharisees had some major questions. But instead of approaching Jesus, they come up to His disciples and ask: “**Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?**” This was really more of an accusation than a question. If Jesus was anyone to be respected then how could he hang around such low-life’s like these. Even worse, how could Jesus actually be eating dinner, sharing a table with tax collectors and sinners. These Pharisees would not even consider entering the house of a publican.

On hearing this questioning, really accusations, about Jesus’ credentials and what He was doing, 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.**” Right here we have a clear picture of what Jesus came to do! He came to call sinners to repentance and forgiveness - to call them to Him. He came to seek and save the lost. Jesus is the Great Physician who alone can provide spiritual healing for all those who are sick and dying because of their sins. Jesus wants sinners to understand the urgency of their sickness. He wants people who long for His mercy, people who, once they experience His mercy, are filled with love and joy and obedience. That is what God desires - not people who go through the motions of sacrifices - not people who think they deserve things from God because of some laws they have kept, not those who believe they are too righteous to need Jesus.

Jesus never condones sin. He never joined in with the sins of the people whose company he kept. But Jesus did not avoid sinners either. Jesus makes it crystal clear it is for sinners that He came. Want a mission statement? Jesus says, “**I have come to call sinners.**” Paul puts it to Timothy this way: “**Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**” (1 Timothy 1). For the next three years Matthew would watch what Jesus did to save sinners. He witnessed

Jesus live a perfect life for God, a life that Mathew, that you and I, and that every other person failed to live. Matthew saw Jesus keep all of God's commands all the time. Then Mathew saw Jesus pay the wages of Matthew's own sins. He watched Jesus go willingly to suffer a horrible death, a death sinners like Matthew deserved. He observed the unshakable love a the Savior who would not be deterred from the cross itself. Matthew beheld the once for all sacrifice of the innocent and perfect Lamb of God to save sinners. Then with His own eyes this former tax collector viewed the victory, the victory of life, the victory over sin, the victory over death as His Lord and Savior Jesus rose in triumph. Jesus did exactly what He said He came to do - He saved sinners.

What a comfort this is not just for Matthew, but for you and me! Jesus came to call sinners, sinners like you and me to repentance and faith! To think that Jesus would call a person like Matthew not just to faith, but to actually be an apostle and write the very first Gospel, to think that the Lord would call someone like me, not just to be His child, but to serve as a pastor of His people, pastor of souls which He purchased and bought with His own blood, is astounding, even exhilarating! Dear friends, how awesome it is to know that Jesus is our Great Physician, that Jesus still comes to call sinners!

Now that Jesus makes a mission statement, does it better help us understand ours? Why do we exist as a church and what is our primary goal? It certainly is not wrong to have a mission of wanting to serve the physical needs of others, to show love and compassion for the less fortunate. It is not wrong to want to work with others despite social or cultural differences and make the city we live in a better place. If that was Jesus' primary goal on earth then maybe that should be ours as a church as well. But Jesus did not come into the world just to make it a better place, Jesus came to save the world. Jesus did even leave the holy city of Jerusalem a peaceful place when He left, but He did provide sinners with a peace with God that the world cannot give. Jesus came to save sinners - to call sinners to Him. That's the good news of the gospel. That is the Gospel, the good news, Jesus sends us out with and says preach it to all creation. Should not the mission of our church be first and foremost the work Jesus has given to us? It is my prayer Amazing Grace always be God's Word in action as our mission statement says because it is the Word Jesus gave us to preach and teach. It is His Word that sinners need to hear. Make our mission statement clear for Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners! Amen.