

Third Sunday after Pentecost

June 29, 2014

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)

Doctors...Who likes to go to the doctor? I don’t even like it when my little Rachel pretends to be a doctor. She usually tells me I am very sick and says I am going to need some shots. So she gets out anything that looks like a needle and adds *“This is really going to hurt.”* I don’t know anyone who likes going to see the doctor. The truth is some of us can be downright stubborn when it comes to seeing a doctor. Sometimes it takes someone to point out the seriousness of our condition or the consequences of an injury before we finally give in and go to the doctor for help.

Today, our Savior does this for us in His Word. He teaches us we are in need of a doctor. We all have an incurable disease - a disease we cannot do anything about on our own. This disease is sin. As we focus on the calling of Matthew, Jesus wants us to see our sin. As we focus on this account, God also wants us to see that: **Jesus is a great and merciful Physician.**

Soon after Jesus began His public ministry in Galilee news of His power and message spread throughout the land. He proved to be a great physician of body as He healed many sick & drove away demons. Jesus had shown Himself to be a master of prescribing the medicine of God’s Word to souls. The message is even floating around that perhaps Jesus is the Christ. Right before our text Jesus, the great & merciful physician, was at it again by providing healing, both physical and spiritual, for a paralytic. Now we are told: *“As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth.”*

Perhaps as the people see Jesus heading for this tax collector’s booth they think: *“Oh good, these people are going to get what they have coming.”* Perhaps some are expecting a display like when Jesus angrily overturned the tables of the moneychangers in the temple court. Why? Because tax collectors were regarded as the vilest of sinners. They had a reputation of being dishonest. They worked for the hated Romans, collecting dues for the government, remitting a fixed amount and keeping for themselves whatever they could collect beyond that. Often they would collect unreasonable amounts and enrich themselves in the process. Tax collectors were barred from the synagogue and were forbidden to have any religious contact with “respectable” Jews. They were regarded as traitors and liars.

Jesus approaches a tax collector named Matthew. While we aren’t given any background on Matthew, it is evident He recognizes Jesus. Matthew either heard Jesus

preaching the Word or heard it from someone else. Perhaps he heard the urgent warning to repent of his sins. Maybe he heard portions of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Maybe He heard Jesus' words about storing up treasures in heaven instead of earthly treasures. Perhaps he witnessed one of Jesus' miracles. Whatever Matthew heard or saw of Jesus, imagine the great burden on his heart. He is an outcast among his own people & excluded from the synagogue. He is a sinner. Now Jesus, possibly the Messiah, is approaching him! Would this teacher even speak to someone whose sin is as public as his office of tax collector?

Jesus does speak. Not only does Jesus speak, but what He says to this sinner is remarkable. He says two simple words: "**Follow me**". "*Leave your life of sin. From now on your heart and life belong to me. I will take care of you and provide for you.*" "**Follow me.**" What a gracious call! What a beautiful invitation! These are words that offer and guarantee all of the eternal blessings of a lifelong association with the Savior. It is also a call into service in the Lord's kingdom. Jesus wants this man to be His disciple.

Does such a call surprise you? Are you asking yourself why Jesus would call a tax collector to be one of His twelve apostles? Some Pharisees certainly did. They wondered how this invitation could be made to a man like Matthew. They wouldn't even be seen talking with such a person. In fact, they ask Jesus' disciples, "**Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?**" It amazes them, that, if Jesus is such a great teacher, if He has so much authority, if He is who He claimed to be, then why is He wasting His time with these outcasts and calling followers like Matthew. Jesus hears this and Jesus answers them, "**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.**"

In this brief reply Jesus does two things. First Jesus explains His mission on earth to call people like Matthew to eternal life. He came to show love and mercy to those who need it. He came to save sinners. Secondly, He reaches out to the Pharisees who imagine they are righteous. He sarcastically is saying, "*You are righteous. Why would I call you? Shouldn't I spend time with those who need me?*" What Jesus is really doing is trying to open their eyes to the truth. They needed the great Physician just as much as Matthew did. That's why Jesus so often spoke the law to them. Jesus knows at times it really hurts, but they needed to take a careful look at their own sins. How had they treated their spouses? Have they always helped those in need? Have they ever cheated or lied? As spiritual leaders did they faithfully absolve others who were burdened with sin? Have they kept their thoughts pure? Jesus tells them God's desires mercy not sacrifice – what is in a person's heart is more important than outward acts. They needed the mercy of God just as much as someone like Matthew. They needed to learn how to be merciful.

And so do we! Are we ever like the Pharisees? Do we ever feel that Jesus should spend more time with people like us than with others? Do we ever consider ourselves to be spiritually healthy or at least stronger than others? Can we be fooled and blinded into thinking there at times that we that we don't need God - that we don't need a Savior? God's mercy is needed not just for those sick outside these walls, but for us. In here there are liars & cheaters & traitors. Right here are the sinners. Jesus' law hurts us but it is needed so we understand we are the ones who are sick and dying.

Thankfully there is a great and merciful physician. Jesus provides healing and rest for our souls through the forgiveness of sins. Jesus puts our hearts and minds at peace. Matthew finds this peace in the Savior's gracious invitation. We see this in how he responds to Jesus' command of "Follow me". **"Matthew got up and followed him."** Luke's account adds: **"He left everything and followed him."** (5) There is no hesitation on the part of Matthew - his burden is lifted - his Savior is here. He is willing to leave it all - his money - his possessions - his sinful way of life. He is ready to follow the One who offers him a new life. He is ready to follow the One who came to save him.

Where will Matthew follow Jesus? He will follow Jesus many places during the next three years and will learn many things. He will see just what Jesus meant when Jesus said He came to seek and save the lost. Matthew will witness just how far Jesus would go to save them; for Jesus' mission to save included suffering the pains of hell on a cross for sinners; His mission to save included pouring out His own lifeblood on the cross for them. Paul describes Jesus' completed mission in our epistle this morning when He writes: **"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification"** (Romans 4). By the time Matthew wrote this Gospel to share with the world do you think He understood mercy - God's pity and compassion and love for sinners? Jesus calls him, a tax collector. Jesus goes willingly in the place of him, a former tax collector, to suffer and die on a cross so that by His wounds, Matthew, a complete and utter sinner, could be healed.

Dear friends, that is what Jesus, our great & merciful physician has done for each of us as well. Now like Matthew I pray that we too invite many others to our house where they may hear about Jesus. I pray like Matthew we want others to find the Savior who found Him. I pray we point all who share with us the deadly disease of sin to the only Physician that can provide healing.

Doctors...Who wants to go to a doctor? Sometimes it isn't so bad. A doctor can actually bring great news at times: *"Your bone is healed."* *"Your blood pressure is lower."* *"Your cancer is in remission."* But no news is greater than the message Jesus brings us today. Yes, His Word, like a surgeon's knife, sometimes cuts deep when He calls us to see our sin and its consequences. But then He brings His healing message as when He told the paralytic: **"Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."** Only Jesus, a great and merciful physician, brings us such comfort and relief. Only He can heal us from our sickness and incurable disease called sin. One day He promises to take us to a place where we will be cured permanently - a place where **"He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain"**(Rev. 20). Now, with Jesus, we finally have one doctor we want to go to! Amen.