

The Third Sunday After Pentecost (June 21, 2020)	1857
O.T. Lesson: Hosea 5:15--6:6	The Common Service: p. 15
Epistle: Romans 4:18-25	339
Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13	Psalm 119c
Text: Matthew 9:9-13	596
Theme: <u>The Savior Calls Sinners.</u>	304 vs. 1-4
I. Sinners who are disgusting.	313
II. Sinners who are desperate.	304 vs. 5-7

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

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."

Dear sinners, called to follow Jesus,

Unlimited anytime minutes anywhere in the United States -- That's what most cellular phone plans are now, and even many land lines. Then you don't have to worry about roaming or long distance charges. You can call anyone in the country, anytime. Call a friend. Call a relative. Share a few minutes of your time with them, and it won't cost you a red cent, except for your monthly service charges, of course.

The words of Scripture which we just heard speak of a call, a call that Jesus makes. It's not a telephone call, although it is similar in some respects. You see, Jesus has a message for us, some wonderfully good news. So he calls us. In his word he graciously invites us to follow him, to listen to his glad tidings, and to receive the boundless blessings that he has won for us. But Jesus doesn't hang up after a few minutes. He has unlimited anytime minutes. He continues to speak to us in his word for all eternity.

The question we want to concern ourselves with this morning is, "Whom does the Savior call?" When we make phone calls, we call friends and relatives, people with whom we have much in common. When the Savior calls, he calls people who do not even know him, even people who hate him. The Savior calls people who have nothing in common with him, people whose lives are totally contrary to his own. That's the truth God wants to hold before us this morning. The Savior Calls Sinners, sinners who are disgusting, sinners who are desperate.

Just such a disgusting sinner was Matthew, the man whom Mark in his gospel identifies as Levi, the son of Alphaeus. Evidently, after becoming one of Jesus' disciples, his name was changed from Levi to Matthew. Matthew was sitting in a tax collector's booth near Capernaum on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee, collecting taxes for the Roman government. No doubt this customhouse was one of importance, taxing ships crossing the Sea of Galilee. Capernaum was also located on a major trade route, so

Matthew was likely involved in receiving the customs from merchants traveling from Damascus and the East. For such a job, Matthew may have been well educated, and probably was well paid.

Yet his position was not usually considered to be an honorable one. We know that the Jews hated tax collectors like Matthew. These tax collectors lacked patriotism. They worked for the Roman government, the enemies and oppressors of the Jews. Generally the tax collectors were also very greedy, demanding all they could get to enrich themselves. The people looked upon Matthew and his kind with disgust.

Worse than that, Matthew was a sinner in the eyes of God. Not that his job as a tax collector was necessarily wrong, and we don't know that he was guilty of cheating people. But Matthew was a guilty sinner just like you and I are. From birth he had a heart that was turned against God. He had a mind full of evil thoughts. He had a tongue that served to dishonor instead of praise his creator. Matthew, like us, had a heart that was more interested in himself than in others, and hands that reached out to help himself, but often remained motionless when the needs of others were apparent.

On one particular day Jesus was walking along the coast of the Sea of Galilee. He had been traveling about, teaching and performing many miracles, stilling winds and waves, casting out demons, and healing the sick. These miracles, though they were spectacular, were nothing compared to the miracle that Jesus was about to perform in the heart of Matthew. As Jesus walked along, with a large crowd following, he took note of Matthew sitting there at the tax collector's booth, and Jesus called him. Jesus simply said, "Follow me." By that he was saying, "Leave behind your present life-style and attach yourself to me. Listen to my teaching and follow wherever I lead you as my disciple."

We are simply told, "Matthew got up and followed him." Matthew had likely heard of Jesus before, but somehow this personal invitation turned him around and moved him to stop avoiding his Savior and instead to follow him. Consider the sacrifices Matthew made. He left his job and his high-paying salary, for now he trusted that Jesus would provide for him.

Matthew soon found out that following Jesus is worthwhile. Yes, Matthew was a disreputable sinner, but he heard Jesus tell him, "Your sins are forgiven." Later Matthew was there in the upper room, when Jesus said, "Take, eat, this is my body. Take, drink, this is my blood, given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins." Matthew was there behind locked doors after Christ's resurrection, when Jesus appeared bodily and said, "Peace be with you." -- "Peace be with you because I have taken all your sins upon myself, suffered and paid the price for them all on the cross."

Jesus called Matthew to know him as his Savior who had given him heaven. Yet there is even more to the Savior's call. He also offers sinners the privilege of telling others the good news of salvation. Jesus used Matthew as one of his twelve apostles, who were sent out to preach the gospel to all the world. Matthew is still proclaiming the Savior today, by means of his Gospel account, which is before us now, which he penned by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Soon after Jesus called him, Matthew threw a large banquet at his house in honor of Jesus. This was an opportunity for Matthew to say "farewell" to his friends and business associates, also an opportunity to introduce them to the Savior. There at Matthew's house, Jesus and his disciples ate with many tax collectors and with sinners, disreputable people, usually considered the scum of Jewish society. At this banquet Jesus was calling,

calling disgusting sinners, calling them to repent and receive the gift of salvation.

Jesus was touching the untouchables, and when the proud Pharisees saw this, they didn't like it. To them, these disgusting sinners were to be avoided. The Pharisees asked Jesus' disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered their objections by simply explaining, "That's why I am here on earth. I have come to call **sinners**."

This, of course, is not the only time that Jesus called disgusting sinners. He made a habit of it. He called a Samaritan woman, who had had five husbands, and was living with a man who was not her husband. He called that little thief, Zacchaeus. Jesus called a Canaanite woman, whom he himself refers to as a dog. He called a woman who had been caught in adultery. He called a criminal, hanging on a cross. Without exception, every person whom Jesus called was a disgusting sinner, condemned to hell. Indeed, Jesus demonstrated that he had come to seek and to save the lost!

So today, the Savior's voice is heard in prisons. He calls to men with blood on their hands. His voice rings in the ears of prostitutes and thieves. He is heard by drunks and homosexuals. We know that Jesus calls disgusting sinners, because, my dear friends, he has called you and me. It doesn't matter what your sins have been, how many or how great they are, you are forgiven in Christ. He says to you, "Follow me. Receive the salvation I have given you."

Jesus has also called us to proclaim this good news to others. Bringing others to the Savior is simply part of being one of his disciples. Think of it. The Savior uses us! What a tremendous privilege for such unworthy sinners!

Have you ever wondered why Jesus seems to have spent most of his time with the poor, the lowly, the sick, and the wicked? Why is it that Jesus had a tax collector as a disciple, and lowly fishermen as disciples, but no Pharisees? Why are his words of comfort most often spoken to the dregs of society? It is because these people are desperate. They know they need help. The Savior calls sinners who are desperate.

It takes a desperate man to give up a career in order to receive help. That's how desperate Matthew was. He knew he was a sinner who could not stand before God, and his high-paying job gave him no comfort nor peace. He was desperate for help, and so were the tax collectors and sinners at Matthew's banquet. Since they were so hated and condemned by others, I doubt if they were happy with themselves. How they delighted in Jesus' message, "I have come to call sinners."

The Pharisees on the other hand were the upper class "moral majority" in Jewish society. They were not desperate at all. They thought poorly of Jesus for eating with tax collectors and sinners. "If he's so great, why doesn't he avoid them and spend his time with good people like us?" The Pharisees felt secure in their own self-righteousness.

Jesus, overhearing the conversation, answers the Pharisees, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." Who in their right mind undergoes surgery when they don't think that anything is wrong? A doctor cannot help those who are healthy. He works with the sick. So Jesus says, "Why should I spend my time with you Pharisees? You think you're secure. You don't need me. But look at these tax collectors. They're desperate. I can help them. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." The righteous don't need a Savior just like the healthy don't need a doctor. The righteous feel sure they can get to heaven without a Savior. Only sinners realize they need Jesus. Only sinners can be Christians. The righteous don't need to be Christians.

Of course the Pharisees were just as sick with sin as the tax collectors. The only

difference was, they were blind to the fact, and so were worse off. The Pharisees demonstrated the hatred in their hearts by the way they treated others, even trying to keep Jesus from helping the tax collectors. They thought, "Let these sinners die and go to hell; but God, I thank you that I am not like them. I worship you regularly. I sacrifice to you. I give a tenth of all I have, fast twice a week, and I keep all sorts of rules and regulations."

But Jesus says, "So what! Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' Your worship, tithes, and so-called good works are worthless because they flow from a loveless heart. Mercy is what God desires, a heart that reaches out and helps people like these tax collectors. Go and measure yourselves according to the law of love, 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" According to that measuring stick, the Pharisees would come up far short, and if they were honest, they would have to admit, "Yes, we need Jesus too. Yes, we're desperate."

Tragically, the Pharisees could never seem to face up to the fact that they needed Jesus. They were like someone who is dying of cancer, but won't admit it. The doctor cannot help the person who refuses to undergo treatment, who washes the bottle of pills down the drain. What would a Pharisee do with a call from Jesus? Say, "Sorry, you must have the wrong number; I don't need your help." and hang up. The self-righteous aren't ready for Jesus. They aren't desperate. Jesus says, "I have not come to call the righteous. If you think you're good enough, then I can't help you. I have come to call sinners."

We, of course, have a lot of Pharisees in our world today too, people who think they're better than others, people who won't admit that they're wretched sinners, people who with cold hearts go through the motions of worship on Sunday morning, thinking they're fulfilling their duty to God, or even doing God a favor. When the gospel is presented to such people, it falls on deaf ears. They need the law. Their self-righteous hearts need to be pierced and driven through by the law. In the Old Testament, when God's people failed to see their sin, this is what God told them: "What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you. For I desire mercy, not sacrifice." [Hosea 6:4-6] Does that sound like a harsh God? No! What a God of love to discipline his children and show them how much they need their Savior. God destroyed their security, their self-righteousness. He brought them low and made them desperate, so that he might save them.

We, of course, all have a Pharisee within us. We like to look at ourselves and think that we're pretty good, better than a lot of people we can think of. Let us remember Jesus' words, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." By ourselves, what do we have to sacrifice? We have nothing to give to God. But God says, "I desire mercy." Christ showed us what mercy is. It's a self-sacrificing love that caused him to come and live on earth with sinners. He suffered and died on the cross for all, for a Matthew, for sinners, for self-righteous Pharisees, for you and for me.

Yes, we are disgusting sinners, and thank God that he has shown us how terrible we are by means of his law. Our condition is desperate, but don't despair. We have a Savior who says, "I have come to call sinners. Come, follow me!"

Amen.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.