

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 3 – May 29th and June 1st, 2008

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 spiritually healed by the love and mercy of our God,

If we sat down and added up all the visits we have made to the Doctor or to the hospital, how many would it be? I would venture to guess that even the healthiest of us have visited a hospital or doctor many times in our lifetimes. Some of us more than others. Let me ask you a simple question, "Why do we go to a hospital or to a doctor? Is it because we like the atmosphere, and it is a nice place to visit? No! The answer is simple. We visit a hospital or doctor when we are sick or in need of some help for our bodies. We don't generally visit a hospital when we are healthy. We don't generally think that a visit to a doctor is fun, but it is often times very necessary. That is why we are thankful to God when he has blessed us with good health and the such, because then we don't need to see the doctor. But we are not going to spend a whole sermon talking about who of us is healthy and who of us is physically less healthy. But the illustration of a doctor who heals the sick is a good one, and today we will see how it fits us as sinners very well. Spiritually the picture of the sick person fits us and all people very well. The picture of us needing a doctor is perfect, when we look at our spiritual condition. We are full of sickness through and through which is sin. Yet this does not stop Jesus from being there for us and for all sinners.

Text: Matthew 9:9-13

Theme: Jesus Came To Heal The Sick

- 1. Jesus seeks out the spiritually sick**
- 2. Jesus gives his spiritual medicine to heal us**

Our text for this morning is a wonderful example of the love and mercy that Jesus shows to us as sinners. The story we have before us this morning is the story of the calling of Matthew who went on to become one of the 12 disciples and an apostle. In our story we get a glimpse of who Matthew was, and we also see the special grace of God, as it plays into the calling of Matthew. Matthew was **"sitting at the tax collectors booth."** This tells us who Matthew was. He was a tax collector. This seems like an unimportant point, but there is more to the picture than meets the eye. A tax collector was not well liked by his fellow Jews, much in the same way as the IRS is not always high on the list of most liked people today. A tax collector had a number of strikes against him. He first of all was hired by the Roman government and thus was labeled as a traitor who was working for the enemy. Second a tax collector was often times in this profession to make money at the expense of his fellow man. He did this by overcharging them. If there was ever a person that was to be considered the lowest life on this earth, it was the tax collector. If there was ever a person who didn't deserve to be saved, from a worldly point of view, it was a tax collector. From the outward appearance a tax collector deserved to die eternally in the fires of hell. As we look at Matthew, we might be quick to jump up and say how bad Matthew was. As we look at Matthew and his life style, we might think that we are much better than he was. It is easy to point our finger at someone else or to measure

ourselves next to someone who looks worse. On the outside we can make ourselves look very good.

But Jesus was able to look into the heart. Jesus was able to look past Matthew's job, and the things he may have done wrong to the fact that Matthew was sorry for his sins and was also going to be called as one of the 12 disciples. Jesus does not judge by mere outward appearance and past lifestyles. Jesus came as a seeker of lost souls. He did not only minister to those who could give lots of money or to those who seemed better. He came for all sinners. Jesus came to Matthew as he was collecting his taxes and said to him, **"Follow me."** At this we can see Jesus coming and inviting Matthew to follow him as a Savior. First of all he was asked to follow Jesus as a repentant and saved sinner. Secondly he was asked to follow Jesus as a servant of Jesus who was one of his disciples. At this point it tells us, **"Matthew got up and followed him."** Matthew was led by the preaching of the law and gospel to realize his need for a Savior, and the Holy Spirit came into his heart to work saving faith in him. Matthew upon his following of Jesus was filled with love and thanks. He invited Jesus to come and eat with him. As our text tells us there were also many other **"sinners and tax collectors"** there with him at this meal. It was a collection of "sinners" as our text puts it. This is to contrast the pious righteousness of the Pharisees who thought they were above these people.

This was too much for the Pharisees. As usual the Pharisees were not at all pleased with Jesus. They were constantly looking for a way to trip him up and destroy his credibility among the people. This seemed like another opportunity for them. The Pharisees asked Jesus' disciples, **"why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"** They had this incorrect concept of who was a sinner. They were led by an outward form of judgment. They were only concerned with how a person acted, and how he kept the laws that were prescribed by the Pharisees. Once again we can see how the Pharisee's misuse of God's law fogged the true purpose and reason for why Jesus came to this earth. They perceived some people to be to "low" for a "righteous" person to associate with. They seemed to go so far as to label association with a low life to be wrong, a sin of some sort.

Jesus heard this question asked by the Pharisees, and he was quick to use this question as a good opportunity once again to preach the truths of our salvation. Jesus says, **"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick."** As we look back to our introduction, we stated that we don't go to a doctor when we are healthy. We go to a doctor when we need medicine or some other type of help. Jesus uses this illustration to once again point out very clearly why he came to this earth. He definitely did not come to make a good name for himself. He did not come to look good. He did not come to please the Pharisees. He came to save lost souls, as he writes, **"for I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."** He was not looking for those who already felt they were good, such as the Pharisees. Jesus came to save those who are lost sinners and saw that they were in need of a Savior.

This also spills over very much into our life. We may not think that we are as bad a sinner as Matthew, but we are. The key is that we are lost sinners, and Jesus came to save us. He did not think that we were so bad that he was going to leave us to die eternally. After all he didn't have to come down to this and die for us. As we think of what we were like before God came into our hearts, we see a terrible lost sinner. As we look back and realize how much sin had corrupted our hearts before God came to us, we see nothing but the fires of hell as our destination. We are all sinners, but now we are saved sinners or saints of God. This doesn't mean that we are perfect. This however does mean that we are full of the Holy Spirit, and we are in a daily struggle with our Old Man that is still in us. In our struggles it is the Old Man which sits in us and tells us that we don't want to tell that person about Jesus, because he looks bad on the outside. It is our Old Adam which sits in us and makes us feel good, because we are not as bad as that person in prison or jail. It is our Old Adam which sometimes puts ourselves on a pedestal above "so called sinners." Yes, Jesus came to save the lost of which we are a part.

Jesus tells the Pharisees some words of advice, and these are words for us also, **"I desire mercy, not sacrifice."** These words tell us what God expects from us as Christians. We have been given everything through the blood of Christ for our sins. What does God expect in return? Does he expect us to do lots of good things? Does he expect us to make lots of sacrifices? Does he look for a person that looks good on the outside, or does he look for a person that is full of God's mercy and shows it in his life of thanks and praise? It is the latter. When we put our lives into the true new creation that was given us by Christ, we get the full picture for us as Christians. God doesn't say you are good, because of what you are doing or what you did. God does not say that all your works make you a better person in his eyes. I know that many of us here this morning are saying that I already know this. But how often don't our actions speak otherwise? Why do we do good works? Why do we give our offerings or help out with our time and talents? Why do we attend church? Why do we live as we do? Multiple choice a) We do all these things because God likes us when we do them. b) We do all these things because it is the right thing to do. c) We do all these things because they help me in my salvation. d) We do all these things out of love and thanks to Jesus for dying on the cross for all my sins. It is the last answer. We are to do all things out of love and thanks. Our works are not something that make us better than one another. All of our good works flow out of the grace God has given to us. All of the things we do are motivated by Christ and not by how we are perceived in the eyes of others or by the praise we get for doing them.

The final thing that we can draw from these words and especially from the picture of the doctor is what is the medicine that Jesus as our doctor uses. The medicine that we have is the Gospel of Jesus Christ found in the Word and Sacraments. There is no other medicine that can be found that will save us from our spiritual sickness of sin. And since God has so clearly pointed out the saving power of the Word and the Sacraments, we can look no where else to find our Salvation. This is important as we look around us. Let me ask you a question? Do you think of the church as a hospital or a fitness center? This may seem like a silly question, but it goes a long way in showing us where our strength lies. A hospital is there to heal the sick and to use the medicine that they have to make people better. In the setting of a church, a church is like a hospital that is there to treat the spiritual corruption of sin with the medicine of the Word and Sacrament. On the other hand what about a Church that is like a fitness center. A fitness center is meant to exercise a body to make it stronger. If we put a church into this setting, it is a place where a person grows stronger by what he is doing himself. The more he exercises the stronger he gets. He is more concerned with his inner power than the medicine of God's Word and the Sacraments. God's Medicine or the Means of Grace doesn't play a very important part in this type of church.

This illustration might seem like an unimportant picture. But what is our purpose? Does our purpose follow the words of Jesus that say a sick person needs a doctor, or are we more concerned with setting up other programs and ideas to draw people to our fitness where you work to make yourselves better? We have already been given the perfect and all-powerful medicine. Why do we need to look else where for help? In the end, we would say that we as Lutherans know from Scripture that God came to heal the sick, and we also know that all people are sick in their sin. Thus God came for all people. No one is too bad, unless they have rejected the Holy Spirit. Also we know no one can heal themselves, but that is what many other churches are teaching. Many other churches say to heal yourselves or try to work out your salvation in the setting of a fitness center without much emphasis on the only cure of God's Word and the Sacraments. But God teaches us the only thing we need and works is the Means of Grace and that is what gives us the strength. God is the "Head Doctor", and he has seen fit to provide the medicine to wipe away all of our sins. He has revealed to us in his Word all that Christ accomplished for us on the cross.

Let us never forget the true mission of the church. Do not let us get caught up in outward appearances and outward means of salvation and in the process try to find other ways to lead people to Christ. Let us always remember that Jesus was willing and eager to look out for lost sinners such as you and

me. Let us also remember that he has entrusted us with the privilege of using the Means of Grace to tell others about Christ. What is our purpose? It is to tell others about Christ. It is to administer faithfully the “medicine” of God’s Gospel that God has entrusted to our care. And what is Christ's attitude towards sinners? Jesus in love and mercy receives all those who believe in him. What comfort is in this for us? We know that God cares for us. Let us also take this Word to others so that others may receive this same love and mercy. Let us share with them the saving medicine of Jesus as it is revealed in the Word and Sacraments. Jesus has given us the greatest medicine ever found. Don't let us sit on it and hog it or be selfish with it. Instead spread this Good News to all people. Jesus came to save Sinners through his glorious death and resurrection from the dead. Through this we truly have forgiveness from all of our sins.

This also leads us to recognize the wonderful partnership that St. Luke’s has with the many other Christians that are united in Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. As we sit here today, we don’t really think too much about the work of our synod. We can’t always see the synod and we don’t always know what the synod is doing for us – the people of St. Luke’s. It is easy to lose track of the wonderful blessings that come from being united with 400,000 other Christians who believe as we believe. They value the same Word of God without error or mistake. They trust the same teaching of being saved by Grace alone through faith. On our offering envelope we have one blank marked as missions. Do we really know what this blank means or what it is for? When we give to mission, we are giving to the mission of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. And what is the mission of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod? It is to share God’s Word with as many people as possible through our Home Missions and World Missions and to make sure that we all have pastors and teachers who are educated and trained in the truths of God’s Word. Without the synod, it would be very difficult for St. Luke’s to train its own Pastors and Teachers. Without the synod, it would be very difficult to do mission work around the USA and it most certainly would be difficult to do mission work around the world. I pray that we never lose sight that St. Luke’s is apart of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod and that we have been blessed by being in this synod and that we never lose sight of supporting our synod as we seek to better fulfill God’s great commission to make disciples of all nations. Amen.