

Sermon for June 11, 2023 – 2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 9:9-13 (EHV)

Theme: **Jesus, the caring physician . . .**

- 1) Meets us where we're at.
- 2) Makes our home his clinic for others.

*<sup>9</sup>As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting in the tax collector's booth. He said to him, "Follow me." Matthew got up and followed him. <sup>10</sup>As Jesus was reclining at the table in Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners were actually there too, eating with Jesus and his disciples. <sup>11</sup>When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" <sup>12</sup>When Jesus heard this, he said to them, "The healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do. <sup>13</sup>Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' In fact, I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

Doctor Zenner was a physician in Kewaunee. My shut-ins loved him. Why? Because he made house calls. By visiting his patients' homes, the good doctor was able to note their nutrition and living situation firsthand so he could better tailor his care to their needs. More than that, he gained his patients' trust and loyalty. Much good came from Dr. Zenner's house calls.

Do you know who else makes house calls? Jesus. Why? So, He can lovingly meet us where we are at to address our greatest needs. With the example of Matthew's call to discipleship as our guide, let us consider the personalized love our Saviour has for us, under the theme: **Jesus, the caring physician . . .** 1) Meets us where we're at and 2) Makes our home his clinic for others.

Part One: Jesus, the caring physician, meets us where we're at.

Our sermon text takes place early in Jesus' ministry in Capernaum. A Jew named Matthew lived there. Most of his countrymen hated him. Why? Because he was a tax collector.

I should take a little time to explain why the Jews especially hated tax collectors. You see, the Roman taxation system was far different from our CRA. The Roman government "privatized" taxation – allowing people (or groups of people) to buy the right to tax. The people who purchased the right to tax were allowed to add a surcharge of their choosing to the taxes they collected for Rome. As you can imagine, tax collecting was a very lucrative business – corrupted by all sorts of greed. It was basically legalized extortion! Jews who became tax collectors were viewed as dirty, rotten scoundrels who cared more about making a profit than helping a fellow citizen in need. Sadly, that assessment was often correct.

This invites the question: why did Matthew become a tax collector? Was it to serve his LORD and fellow man in love? Probably not. The only real reason any Jew would want to become a tax collector in those days was out of love for money!<sup>i</sup> Why else would someone willingly take on an

occupation that automatically expelled them from the synagogues and – according to Jewish rabbis –condemned them to hell?

So, Matthew sat in his tax collecting booth - surrounded by the money he desired. But that money did not bring him the joy he thought it would bring. Something was missing. More gold? That wouldn't soothe the guilt and shame he felt. No, Matthew desired to be at peace with the LORD. But what could he do about it now? The Jewish Rabbis called his occupation unforgivable.

However, a new rabbi showed up at his tax collector's booth one day. Did he come to tell him off and berate him like the other rabbis? No, he came to invite Matthew to leave his life of sin and follow him. And there was something special about his call. It was not full of judgmental superiority. It was full of mercy and compassion. The call was straightforward, with no conditions or strings attached. It was a call to follow Jesus in faith and love.

It was a strange call indeed, and yet there was something incredibly enticing about it. Like a lost little lamb recognizing the voice of its shepherd, Matthew's heart recognized the voice of His merciful LORD. What, then, could he do but follow?

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we all have been like Matthew at some point. Like lost sheep, we wandered away from our Shepherd. We pursued pet sins - imagining they would give our lives true meaning and happiness. For some, it was to chase money; for others, it may have been to pursue romantic love outside marriage. The world is full of ideas, philosophies, and things that the devil uses to entice us away from the truth. Did we find fulfillment by achieving the worldly goals we left Christ to pursue? While we may have felt temporary euphoria in the short term, like a person high on drugs, we found ourselves overwhelmed by all sorts of shame and guilt in the long run.

And the religion the world offers did not help our situation either. Like the Jewish rabbis of Jesus' day, worldly religion tells us that it is up to you to get right with God and make amends. But in your hearts, you know that this is impossible. How could we ever repay God for all the wrongs we have done? How can we, who are accustomed to doing evil, change our nature?

But *what is impossible with people, is possible with God.*<sup>ii</sup> And so, just as Jesus sought out Matthew, He seeks you out as well - meeting you where you are at, surrounded by your sin and shame. Using his Law, the LORD leads you to recognize how valueless and futile your worldly pursuits are. Through His Gospel, he lovingly invites you to follow him – to leave your sins behind and find peace in his forgiving love. And guess what happens when you hear Jesus' call? The Holy Spirit stirs your heart within you. Without understanding how, you somehow recognize the voice graciously calling you to follow him. It is Jesus' voice working through his Word. And so, just as sheep follow their shepherd's voice, you follow Jesus - repenting of your past and trusting in his mercy to forgive.

Praise the LORD for this, brothers and sisters in Christ! Your Jesus is not someone who demands that people come to him. No, as the caring physician that he is, he meets us where we are with His Word – calling us to leave our sins and follow him in faith. And follow him we do! Why? Because, unlike any other rabbi, Jesus graciously meets us where we are at - not to berate us but to save us.

Even if he finds us steeped in the worst of sins, he is willing - with no strings attached - to forgive us of everything as we heed his call to follow him in faith. And that, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is what repentance is all about: heeding Jesus' call to leave sin to follow him – trusting he forgives you!

Doesn't this make you happy – filling you with such joy that you want other people to experience it too? It did for Matthew. That is why he prepared a special feast for his tax-collecting friends to meet Jesus.

Part Two: Jesus, the caring physician, makes our home his clinic for others.

“Jesus at a tax collector’s dinner party, with all sorts of notorious sinners in attendance? How could Jesus go to such a place filled with greedy, godless people?” the world asks. He could go because he knew why Matthew invited him: so his lost friends might also get the chance to meet Jesus and be saved. Jesus could go because his mission was to search and save the lost sheep of Israel, which is why he happily accepted Matthew’s invitation.

But not everyone recognized what Jesus was doing. We read: <sup>i</sup>*When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”*

Make no mistake: the Pharisees were not seeking clarification with their question. They wanted to discredit Jesus with his disciples. “Bad company corrupts good character.”<sup>iii</sup> Doesn't your master's fellowshiping with notorious sinners prove that he is a man of corrupt character?" they insinuated.

Jesus answered the Pharisees for his disciple's sake: *“The healthy do not need a physician, but the sick do.”* In other words, just as a good doctor must be in the midst of sick people to fulfill his purpose, our Saviour must be with the sinners he intends to save. Jesus was in no way condoning their lifestyle by eating with them. Instead, he was lovingly calling them to himself – inviting them to leave their sins behind and receive the peace of his forgiveness. In other words, he turned Matthew's home into a spiritual clinic for sin-sick souls.

As the religious leaders of the day, the Pharisees should have known that. Instead of falsely proclaiming the impossibility of a tax collector being forgiven, they should have been mercifully reaching out to them to repent of their sins. Therefore, Jesus rebukes these Pharisees by saying: <sup>13</sup>*Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ In fact, I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”* God was not impressed with the self-righteous show of religiosity put on by the Pharisees. He despised their bragging about sacrifice and comparing themselves to others.<sup>iv</sup> It disgusted him!

What the LORD desired, instead, is mercy – forgiving others the same way that we have been forgiven. God did not place the Pharisees in their positions of authority to build themselves up as they tore others down. No, as the Scriptures clearly reveal, God wants his representatives to deal mercifully with those they lead. Recognizing their sin and need for forgiveness, they will be able to deal gently with others as they direct them to God's forgiving love.<sup>v</sup>

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the LORD has shown us immense mercy. In great compassion, he met us where we were at – steeped in sin – and invited us to follow him. As a great physician, he used his law to expose the spiritual cancer of our sin. He then used his Gospel to heal us to new life. What a great Saviour we have! How can we not tell others about him? How can we not turn our homes into spiritual clinics – places where our unbelieving or spiritually struggling family and friends can meet Jesus?

“But,” you might ask, “how can we do that?” We do it by sharing God’s Word with them – showing them Jesus through God’s promises in the Bible. Jesus promises to be with us – even though we do not see him. He promises to work through His Word – regardless of who speaks it. In other words, whenever we share the Gospel with others, we become God’s clinic – the place where he brings healing to the spiritually sick and dying.

Let us rejoice in this fact – never forgetting the forgiving love Jesus showed us. Understand that the devil will try to tempt us to become like the Pharisees: sinfully comparing ourselves to others instead of reaching out to them in mercy. Let us, therefore, ask our great physician to continue making his house calls to us: using his law to expose our sins and, more importantly, healing us with the Gospel by pointing to the forgiveness he won through his cross. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> CF. 1 Timothy 6:10

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 18:27

<sup>iii</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 5:33

<sup>iv</sup> Cf. Luke 18:10-14

<sup>v</sup> Cf. Hebrews 5:1-3