

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Eleventh Sunday After Trinity, August 15, 2021

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 42 (238:1) 375, 390, 386:1

Lessons: Proverbs 9:1-10; Romans 10:1-15; Luke 14:16-24

Sermon Text: Matthew 9:9-13

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In Christ our Savior, fellow redeemed,

When something good happens, we hear people say sometimes, “I surely was lucky!” The truth of the matter is that things do not happen by chance or by luck. It was not by chance or luck that Jesus called Matthew the tax collector to be his disciple. Matthew didn’t just happen to be in the right place at the right time so that Jesus saw him. It is also not by chance that we gather together in our worship service to hear the Gospel of Christ Jesus.

All of God’s children in all their affairs are governed and directed by the Lord. Things happen as they do according to God’s good and gracious will for his dear children in Christ. The psalmist says to the Lord, *“I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory,”* Psalm 73:23,24.

Especially in all matters that affect our eternal salvation, the Lord is with us to guide and direct us. Our Savior did not come to this earth by chance. He came here because the heavenly Father from eternity decided that he should come with the express purpose of saving lost sinners.

May the Holy Spirit bless us today as we learn,

JESUS, OUR SAVIOR, RECEIVES SINNERS.

- 1. He called Matthew, a lowly sinner, and He associated with sinners.**
- 2. He condemns the self-righteous who think they have no sin.**
- 3. He wants us to realize our sinfulness and then show mercy to our fellow sinners.**

The evangelist tells about himself being called by Jesus. *“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.”* Matthew was originally named Levi and is so called in Mark’s and Luke’s Gospel. He adopted the name Matthew, we presume, after Jesus called him to be his disciple. Matthew spoke about himself in a humble manner because of his background as a tax collector for the Roman government. He was very conscious of the meaning of his name. Matthew means ‘gift of God.’ It was also a precious gift of God that Matthew was called to follow Jesus.

It was by the grace of God that Jesus revealed himself to Matthew as the Savior who loves sinners. If the Lord called people to follow him according to their merit and fine background, Matthew would never have been called as Jesus’ disciple. Tax collectors were always mentioned in the same breath as sinners, and the term ‘sinners’ was connected also with the heathen and prostitutes. The reason for this was that the Jews had a strong dislike for tax collectors who collected taxes for the Roman government. It always reminded the Jews that they were under the government of the Roman Empire, and they wanted to be free. Tax collectors were considered so

disreputable that they were not accepted as witnesses in the courts, also not as members of the Jewish church. Their bad reputation also resulted from their dishonesty in collecting taxes from the people.

The important point for us to remember is that this is the person Jesus called to follow him. He said to Matthew, ***“Follow me.”*** Jesus often specifically sought out those who were moral outcasts and the rejects of society. It was this reason that the enemies of Jesus accused him, ***“Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners,”*** Matthew 11:19. When Jesus taught the parable of the lost sheep, he told how the shepherd rejoiced over the **one** lost sheep. Jesus applied this parable by saying, ***“I tell you that in the same way there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent,”*** Luke 15:7.

It was by the grace of God that Matthew heeded the call of Jesus and became a disciple of Jesus. The Gospel of Luke says, ***“He left all, rose up, and followed him,”*** Luke 5:28. Not only did Matthew make a clean break with his former sinful way of living, but he also showed his concern for other lost sinners. He made a banquet at his house to honor Jesus and invited the people he had known and associated with as a tax collector. These were other tax collectors and despised sinners. Our text says, ***“While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and ‘sinners’ came and ate with him and his disciples.”*** Jesus the loving Savior here showed his concern for lost sinners. He did not associate with them because he approved of their sinful ways, but because he wanted to help them spiritually. It is for our comfort to know that Jesus delights in helping even the most despised sinners. It was that great love for sinners that moved him to die for us and pay for our sins. St. Paul says, Jesus ***“gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,”*** Galatians 1:4. Thank the Lord that we have such a loving God and Savior!

Our Savior also loved the Pharisees, his bitter enemies, but he had to rebuke them for their own good. We want to learn that **Jesus condemns the self-righteous who think they have no sin.**

2.

When the Pharisees saw Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, ***“they asked his disciples, ‘Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’”*** The Pharisees just could not understand how Jesus could associate with such despised people. To them that kind of conduct on Jesus’ part was an offense and should not be tolerated.

They did not, however, bring the matter before Jesus directly, but they asked his disciples about it. ***“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.”*** Jesus had something that he wanted to teach the Pharisees, a lesson they needed to hear. This little saying about the sick, not the healthy, needing a doctor, is to be applied as a spiritual teaching. Just as no healthy person goes to a doctor to be made well, so also a person who does not think he is a sinner will not seek a Savior from sin.

The Pharisees who always found fault with Jesus during his earthly ministry are representative of those people of all ages who think they are not sinful and need no Savior. Or, at the very least, they think they are not so bad that they cannot do some good and earn God’s favor by their works. That idea is a sad mistake. We are told in Psalm 14, ***“The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one,”*** Psalm 14:2-4. This Bible truth is contradicted by this worldly reasoning: ‘There is a little good in everyone, and given the right opportunity and environment, everyone will do something good.’ The Lord in his holy Word says, ***“There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus,”*** Romans 3:23-24. What about all those preachers who teach that man’s works can please God and they can be saved by doing good? The majority of

people in this world believe that! God's Word teaches otherwise. ***"No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin,"*** Romans 3:20.

If we could save ourselves by so-called good works, it would not have been necessary for God to send his Son as our Savior. All self-righteous people who trust in their good works to please God are showing contempt for the Lord Jesus who came to save sinners. The **Augsburg Confession** says, ***"Whoever, therefore, trusts that by works he merits grace, despises the merit and grace of Christ, who seeks a way to God without Christ, by human strength, although Christ has said of Himself: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, John 14:6,"*** (Article XX, Concordia Triglotta, page 55.) So Jesus condemned the self-righteous who think they have no sin and can merit eternal life by their works.

Jesus wants us to realize our sinfulness and then show mercy to our fellow sinners.

3.

Jesus told the Pharisees to go back to the Old Testament Scriptures to learn what he wanted to teach them. Jesus quoted from the Book of Micah in his teaching. ***"But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*** We may learn from the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in the temple what Jesus wants us to learn. The Pharisee thought that he was truly sacrificing much to the Lord. He gave more than was expected of him in the law. He thanked God that he was not like other people like the tax collector. Instead of bragging about himself, he should have confessed his sins and shown a merciful attitude toward the humble tax collector.

Are we concerned about our sinful condition and the sinful condition of others? Do we understand what Jesus says in our text, ***"I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners?"*** People who think they are not such bad sinners also are not afraid of eternal damnation in hell and so they do not think they need a Savior. They also are not interested in hearing the Gospel that teaches that Jesus came to save sinners. The Gospel message is for people who are aware of their terrible sinfulness and plead only for God's mercy as did the tax collector in the temple. Of him it is said, ***"He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'" Luke 18:13.***

This should also be our attitude, for we stand condemned by the Law of God, and even our best works, the Bible says, are like filthy rags in God's sight (Isaiah 64:6). May God give us the grace to confess, ***"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me,"*** Psalm 51:1-3. If this is our attitude, then we will truly appreciate what Jesus our Savior did for us. Paul says, ***"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,"*** Romans 5:8. ***"When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son,"*** Romans 5:10 For this reason, ***"we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation,"*** Romans 5:11. Out of gratitude for God's great mercy and grace in Christ we will also show mercy to our fellowmen and do all we can to bring the message of salvation to them.

"My Savior sinners doth receive." May these words of the poet always be our own comfort and our incentive to tell others of Christ. Amen.

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