

Fr. Michael Brockman  
Feast of St. Matthew  
21 September 2014  
Matthew 9:9  
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita, KS

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen*

Finding sinners is not difficult. It's easier than finding a doctor. Jesus found sinners in trees, along roadsides, in synagogues and here, in Matthew nine, at tax booths. Sinners were everywhere. Sinners are everywhere. If Jesus were visiting us in this church this morning, He would easily find sinners.

The qualifications for being a sinner are simple: be conceived. Thank you mom and dad! You see, you don't have to DO A SIN, to BE A SINNER! One man's offense spread to all says Scripture. Thank you Adam.

All sin. And, the remuneration, the recompense for being sinners is as simple as how one qualifies. Death is sin's reward. Sin brings death. We die in all sorts of ways, many of them unpleasant. Accidents and falls. Cancers and murders. Explosions and fires. Bullets and bombs. Hurricanes and heart attacks.

So Jesus found a sinner named Matthew. A publican he was, a tax-collector. He was a Hebrew (Levi by Jewish name) but he worked for the Romans. And even though he was hated by his people because of his job, don't think for a moment that Matthew was considering a career change when Jesus passed by his tax collection booth. Matthew had it quite nice. He had the good life. He was well-off!

Suddenly though, Matthew's life was changed. Not the sin part, but the job part. Jesus says to sinful Matthew, "Follow Me." This was no small thing. Matthew must leave everything behind. Cushy job. Influential friends. Great income. But little did Matthew know that following Jesus would mean *leaving much behind*. What would *be ahead* for Matthew? There would be "picking up the cross." There would be "letting the dead bury their own dead." There would be "not loving mother and father, sister and brother over Jesus." There would be "no looking back, once one has put his hand to the plow." Jesus' invitation is truly "Come and die with Me." Indeed, this was not a simple career change.

Matthew you see was an idolater. He worshiped another god. Money. Matthew should have died long before Jesus' call to him. Matthew should have been already in hell's fires. Merciful Jesus, merciful God would rather sacrifice Himself than to have Matthew destroyed. Merciful Jesus, merciful God would rather carry our burden and suffer our shame that have us meet God's demands for justice. Merciful Jesus, merciful God desires mercy, not sacrifice.

Matthew follows Jesus' invitation and then makes an invitation of his own. He asks Jesus to come and dine in his house. St. Luke writes plainly about his friend Matthew: **Levi made [Jesus] a great feast in his house.** Lots of Matthew's friends were invited. More tax collectors. More sinners. Maybe even Saint Luke was there. Sinners were everywhere. Even outside Levi's door. Pharisees and scribes.....the doers of the Law and the interpreters of the Law. Scribes would tell you what you were doing wrong and Pharisees would show you how to do right. Strict judges were they. Legalists to the max. But, did they know they were sinners, sinners as bad as Matthew and his invited feast-attendees?

No. Scribes and Pharisees considered themselves better than others. They had their own plan of salvation---their sacrifices and their works. But Jesus has bad news for them, actually good news for them, if they be not rebellious, if they be not hard-hearted. "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

Works are no good to Jesus. Only His mercy which leads to faith. Only then are they able to take up their cross. Until one knows himself a sinner, he can never take up the cross and follow Jesus.

Stubborn hard-heads always disagree with Jesus. They do not think of themselves as sinner. They do not consider themselves sick. Jesus hits them between their eyes. *Those who are well have no need of a doctor, only those who are sick.* Doctors don't help healthy people. Doctors help those who believe they need medical attention.

Savior Jesus is doctor for the sick. He has come to save sinners. People who are terminally ill with sin. He died for sinners, all sinners. He died on the cross. That was His work, His sacrifice. Anyone saved is saved by faith, not works. Anyone saved is saved by the sacrifice of Jesus, not by their own sacrifices. Jesus has died for all, suffered for all, bled for all.

So, if Jesus dies for all, why don't all believe in Jesus, come to Him, trust in Him, worship Him, adore Him, eat and drink often His body and blood? Because of the heart. At conception, your heart and mine are animal-like: mulish; dogged; pig-headed. We are perverse and obstinate. Then we are born. Then we learn to do sin. We develop our animal like characteristics. We show our perversity. We demonstrate our self-will. We exhibit our prejudice. This is not just a scribe and Pharisee problem. This is your problem. My problem. We have not only misspent years long gone, we have misspent hours of this morning.

Repent. Die to self. Beat your breast. Do not dare to look to God as an equal. Live to Jesus. Follow Jesus. See in His work on the cross a sufficient work for all your failures, for all your sins, for all your perversities.

You can be sure that His sacrifice is enough for you. You can be sure that His work is sufficient payment for your sins. You can be sure that all of your sins are forgiven. You can be sure that your Lord will have mercy on you. How can you be sure? Your Lord says it. His Word tells you.

So we confess. We are not here this morning to impress God. God is not impressed by our creaky knees kneeling on a hard floor. God is not impressed by our arthritic fingers clenched in prayer. God does not want your excuses about your age or about your dysfunctional family is or about how badly the past pastor treated you 20 years ago.

You are here because you, a sinner, desire mercy. It doesn't matter if it is Pastor Brockman or Boyle in this pulpit. It doesn't matter if it is Matthew or Ezekiel or Paul telling you to stop being a rebel. Hear your gift of God, your preacher. Your preacher tells you what Moses told his hearers, "The Lord your God is merciful. He will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers." Your preacher tells you what Jeremiah told his hearers, "Return, faithless Israel. I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful." Your preacher tells you what the Psalmist told his hearers, "Be merciful to me, O Lord, My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my afflictions and my bones grow weak."

Kyrie Eleison. Christe Eleison. Kyrie Eleison. Amen.