

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church

Shobonier, Illinois

Pentecost 2A - Proper 5A

June 7, 2026

Matthew 9:9-13

Follow Me; Mercy Not Sacrifice

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.

10 And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9:9-13 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the Good Physician, the only Savior of the world:

In the long green season after Pentecost, we learn about the growth of the Church and the Christian life, what it is to follow Jesus and live as His disciples. Today, we hear Jesus call Matthew to follow Him and thus demonstrate His mercy – to Matthew and to us.

Now, to the world's way of thinking, Matthew was not exactly a prime candidate to be Jesus' disciple. After all, he was a tax collector, a "publican," one who was especially despised by his fellow Jews. For tax collectors collected taxes for the Romans, the foreign power occupying Israel. So they were seen as collaborators, those who cozied up to the enemy for their own advantage. Furthermore, they often enriched themselves by charging, or collecting, more than they were authorized to do in order to line their own pockets. In the eyes of the public, he was most certainly a sinner, a traitor and a robber.

Yet, when Jesus called him, he followed. Jesus' word did what it said. And while we might ask why Matthew left all and followed Jesus, it shouldn't be hard to see. For in calling Matthew, Jesus showed him mercy. And tax collectors didn't get much of that.

They certainly don't get mercy from the Pharisees. Then again, no one else did either. For the Pharisees had no problem spotting sinners—except when it came to themselves. How about you? If you're anything like me, you're better at pointing out sin in others than in yourself. But if we look into the mirror of God's law, we see that, like Matthew, we too are sinners. Oh, we may not have a tax booth, but inside each of us there is something even worse: Take whatever I can get to satisfy myself. Take the gifts God has given me and use them only for myself. Take from others whatever they can do for me. The symptoms of our sinfulness may not be as obvious as they were in Matthew's case, but the underlying disease is still the same.

It is to sinners like Matthew, and us, that Jesus comes with a gracious invitation. As our text says: "As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him."

Clean and crisp and powerful the call comes. The initiative is all with Jesus. He chooses His disciples. We don't choose Him. The essential and decisive thing is His gracious call. It's not because of anything in us that Jesus calls us. It's only because of something in Him: His divine mercy and grace.

But Jesus does more than call sinners, He also eats with them: "And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'"

The Pharisees were shocked that Jesus would break bread with a houseful of Matthews. But He did. It's not that there's anything virtuous or noble about tax collectors and sinners. There isn't. The point is that God's grace is deep enough to deal with their sin. Thus, He forgives our sin and calls us to repentance and faith and a new way of life.

Indeed, Jesus welcomes sinners. That's great news! Our Lord is not ashamed to have fellowship, table fellowship, with the likes of you and me. Every time the Lord's Supper is offered here in this house, Jesus invites us to eat and drink at His table. At this table He gives you His body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

Matthew and you and I all share the same sickness. It's called sin, and it is a chronic, terminal illness. But thank God, we also have a great physician, namely, Jesus Himself. Jesus says, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." And Jesus is that physician, the doctor who cures our illness and works our healing. His mercy is the healing balm that brings comfort and relief to our sin-sick souls. That's why this Sacrament is called "the medicine of immortality," because it will give life to our dying bodies.

Suppose for a moment that there was a brilliant physician who founded a hospital. What's more, this doctor's personal efforts developed the very effective medicine that the hospital uses. The medicine is based on a rare antibody found in the doctor's own blood. Still today he constantly donates blood with which to make new batches of the medicine. Every drop of the medicine used in treatment gives the patient, as it were, a transfusion of the physician's blood. Therefore the hospital and its patients live in ongoing dependence on the founder for life itself.

In this story, the Church is the hospital, a hospital for sinners. We are those sinners, the patients. And Christ is the doctor who established the hospital and continues to give life to the patients. Just as the medicine has healing power because it is made from the founding doctor's own blood, so the blessed Sacrament applies to us, again and again, the very blood of Christ, which makes us whole.

You've undoubtedly heard someone call for "free universal health care." Of course, what they don't tell you is that it is never free. Somebody's got to pay for it. And so you and I would end up paying a lot more at the tax collector's booth.

But with the "free universal health care" that Jesus, provides, it is truly free. Absolutely free to you. A free gift, all by grace. Of course, there was a price, there was a cost, and

somebody had to pay it. And someone did! Jesus paid it all for you! Christ paid the full cost for you on the cross. By His wounds, you are healed. You are fully covered, and your coverage comes to you free of charge. No co-pay required, or allowed.

Yes, the care Christ provides is free, and it is universal. Everyone is covered. The Son of God paid the price for all sinners, everywhere, for all time, with His holy precious blood. Everyone is covered; no one is left out. And the care that Jesus provides gives you healing for your soul, in the forgiveness of your sins, and ultimate healing for your body, at the resurrection of the dead.

So far, we've been using the word "doctor" in the sense of "physician." But there's another way we can call Jesus "doctor." That's in the sense of "expert teacher." Jesus is the teacher of His disciples. He also wanted to teach the Pharisees the lesson of mercy, but they would not listen. He says: "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

While the Pharisees had no room for mercy, Jesus is full of mercy. While the Pharisees were all about sacrifices, at least outwardly, they had no mercy. To be sure, God had required sacrifices from His people, but they were not everything, or even the main thing. Jesus shows us and teaches us that mercy is greater than sacrifices. He is our example and instructor in dealing mercifully with others.

We extend God's mercy to others by our Christian witness. We tell our friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors about the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. We do not keep to ourselves the refreshing mercy that we have discovered in the gospel. We share it with others. We invite other thirsty souls to join us in receiving God's mercy in Christ.

We also extend mercy to others by our acts of Christian kindness. We don't think of ourselves more highly than we ought, but in humility we serve our neighbor in love. We don't look down our noses in smug superiority at those still caught in the web of sin. We recognize that we too are sinners. We realize that the only reason we are anybody is by the mercy of God. Forgiveness is the gift of God by which we live, and it is forgiveness, then, which we practice and

extend toward others. As disciples, we follow Jesus in extending God's mercy to sinful people, even those who sin against us.

Yes, Jesus is the great Physician and the great teacher of His disciples. We are fellow sinners and fellow disciples. And as the hospital of the Church is only for sinners, the good news today is: The doctor is in! Your appointment is now. The bill has already been paid. Come, receive the medicine of immortality! "Follow me," Jesus is calling out to you today. "Follow me, and learn what mercy is." Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener