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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
June 29, 2014
3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 15:1-6; Acts 3:1-10
Hymns: 242; 324:1-5; 342; 324:7-8 (238:3-5)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 9:9-13

9 As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. 10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. 11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: The company you keep says a lot about you!

That is something that we know, that we have been taught by our parents, or maybe even learned from the school of experience. People will draw certain conclusions about you, about what you are like, about what kind of character you possess by observing the company you keep. Even the Apostle Paul warns us,

1 Corinthians 15:33 “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’”

So it should come as no surprise that those who were observing Jesus were critical about the company with whom Jesus was often seen associating. But wait, is this a legitimate matter of concern about Jesus, or a matter that should lead us to rejoice? We need to consider what kind of company the Savior chooses to keep since He has chosen to associate with you and me! We need to consider the purpose of the Lord’s association with such people of questionable reputation, or even ill repute. So we learn a vitally important lesson from our text which recounts for us the circumstances surrounding the call of a tax collector for Rome being called to be one of Jesus’ closest disciples and constant companions. --

THEME: The Company Jesus Kept Reveals Jesus’ Saving Ways.

The opening verse of our text offers a great insight into the Lord’s way of conducting His ministry. –

I. Jesus Appeals to Sinners

Matthew 9:9-10 9 As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, “Follow Me.” So he arose and followed Him. 10 Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples.

We see from the Lord's calling of Matthew that Jesus had a certain appeal for sinners. Indeed Jesus reached out to a notable sinner. Matthew was not only despised as a tax collector, but as a collaborator with the enemy. He collected taxes from Rome! It was common knowledge that these tax agents were cheats and thieves who charged a premium which they kept for themselves, and so became wealthy at the expense of the people of the towns in which they lived and operated. They lived lavish, and often very worldly lifestyles after the manner of the Greek hedonists, "Let us eat drink and be merry!"

So what did the Pharisees observe? Jesus reaching out to one of these despicable men and saying "**Follow Me.**" He called this thief, this traitor, this man who has flaunted a sinful lifestyle before the whole world to be one of His close associates and disciples! And what came of this? This Matthew commences to gather his motley crew and have one of these gatherings where all this debauchery goes on! At least that's what the Pharisees saw and assumed was going on! Well it is quite clear that Jesus didn't begin His association with Matthew as He had with Nathanael.

John 1: 47 "Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!'"

This Matthew had been full of deceit! And yet Jesus singled Matthew out to be one of the twelve who would accompany Him during His public ministry. It was that ministry that was going on at Matthew's house, not a sinful party. These sinners gathered there to hear Jesus, and learn from Him the way of righteousness and life. They knew their sin and came to Jesus knowing the truth in the hymn we just sang.

TLH 324:2 “We deserve but grief and shame, Yet His words, rich grace revealing, Pardon, peace, and life proclaim. Here their ills have perfect healing Who with humble hearts believe -- Jesus sinners doth receive.”

And that is where we must also begin. We need to know our sin. It is one thing to think about sin in generalities. We are all sinners. But at times we are tempted by our sinful flesh to think of even a specific sin, “That’s no big deal, everybody does it.” The law of God wipes that illusion of relative morality away. Jesus beckons to the sinner. Indeed He has called out to us that we should follow Him. He speaks to us of the way of life. The penitent sinner who sorrows over his sins, and despairs of his own righteousness hears Jesus’ appeal, and by the Spirit’s power is drawn to Jesus.

Oh, Lord, --

TLH 215:4 “Draw us to Thee That also we Thy heavenly bliss inherit, And ever dwell where sin and hell no more can vex our spirit.”

Not everyone responds in this way. Indeed --

II. Jesus Repulses the Self-righteous.

Matthew 9:11-13a “And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ 12 When Jesus heard that, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.”’”

The Pharisees could not believe their eyes! Jesus was actually deliberately eating at the same table with women of ill-repute, and men who partied with such women! So they had to ask Jesus’ disciples, “Why?” Why would your master, your teacher do such a disgusting thing?”

Were they actually looking for a serious answer? Or were they rather trying to attack and undermine Jesus' credibility among His disciples with this question? Clearly they found this act of Jesus repulsive, even revolting! They were not only repulsed by Jesus, confident of their own moral superiority; it was their desire that others should share their opinion of the Lord because of His choice of company. They thought they were pointing out Jesus' weakness for others to see.

In fact they were revealing their own weakness and self-righteousness. Jesus was quick to point out why they felt no need for Jesus and the words of truth which He brought to the world, which He brought to sinners. They were confident that they were spiritually healthy and whole. They had no need of a spiritual physician. Jesus was more than ready to serve those who knew they were spiritually sick, and in need of help. Perhaps if the Pharisees would consider Jesus' next words they would comprehend their own spiritual plight and need for deliverance. Jesus quoted from the Old Testament they read and studied so much. He cited the prophet Hosea.

Hosea 6:6 "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

This statement revealed the sin of the Pharisees. They made all those extra laws, and rules and regulations which they insisted should be observed by all. They paraded around with their special fancy robes, and made sure everyone saw how devout they were! **But they had no mercy!** They had no compassion for the suffering, or the poor, or the distressed sinner. No, these they despised. They were sure to observe every prayer hour, and make a perfect tithe of all they earned, and they were going to be found at the temple for every festival, but they cared little for the souls of others, or the need that others might have for help. This they revealed time again in their criticism of Jesus' healing on the Sabbath. In all their deeds they failed to fulfill the heart of the law, to love God above all things, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

They were confident in their self-righteousness, that they had fulfilled the law's demands.

It is easy for us to fall into the same trap. We may not want to admit it, but moral superiority can creep into our attitude toward others. We also may slip into the manner of thinking that is found in many Christian churches in our day, that God will like us better, and that we make our salvation more secure because of all the fine things we do. Such thinking is a confusion of justification and sanctification. Yes, the Lord wants us to have compassion on the poor and needy and to help the orphans and widows, especially those who are of the household of faith, both in our own land and in foreign countries. Yes, the Lord desires that we should bring offerings to Him to support the gospel ministry, and He longs to hear our prayers and songs of praise in church on Sundays, and throughout the week as well! However this has nothing to do with why the Lord looks upon us as being righteous, and why He shall call us into heaven. That is found in the merits of Christ alone. These things that we do from willing hearts are evidence of the faith and love we have in Jesus and our Father in heaven. To see them as anything more is the same as the sin of the Pharisees.

For this we need to repent, knowing --

III. Jesus Forgives the Repentant.

This is the mission that brought Christ, the Son of God down to earth, and right into the home of Matthew the tax collector. With the concluding words of our text Jesus assures us:

Matthew 9:13b "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

That is exactly what that dinner was all about that day. Yes, Jesus was found in the midst of an assembly of known sinners, but Jesus was not among them to comfort them in

their sin, and assure them that God didn't care about their sinful lifestyles. Not at all! Jesus was there calling sinners to repentance. He was there because "**The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance**" (2 Peter 3:9).

Yes, the Lord desires to save even those we may regard as disgusting sinners. He desires that they should **repent!** That alone leads to salvation. And repentance involves more than feeling bad or guilty about the sin that has ensnared you. It means turning away from the sin, rejecting it has the evil it is, and confessing one's guilt and condemnation because of the sin, actually saying, "**I did it! I'm guilty before the Lord!**" It is not offering excuses or seeking license for sin. And then repentance means turning away from one's own merit as a solution for sin and turning to Jesus for forgiveness and life.

This is very basic to a proper understanding of the gospel. By nature we cling to our sin. When someone claims that they aren't that bad and the good done in one's life outweighs the bad **they are insisting on a continued association with their sin.** They are clinging to the sin and its guilt. Jesus brings us something completely different. **Jesus takes our sins away.** He washes away our guilty stains. God, in Christ, disassociates us from our sin. This is the message of the psalmist quoted on our bulletin cover this morning.

Psalms 103:12 "As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us."

With the forgiving grace of God brought to us in the gospel of Christ as our crucified Savior we are assured that **Jesus takes our sins away**, so that God remembers them no more, and we are righteous and holy before Him now in this life and for all eternity in heaven.

This is the grace and life and salvation to which Jesus calls you today. Hear the voice of our Savior, and know that in

spite of our many sins we can be confident that Jesus has atoned for them all. May the Spirit lead us to Jesus saying:

TLH 324:5,6 “I, a sinner, come to Thee With a penitent confession; Savior mercy show to me Grant for all my sins remission. Let these words my soul relive: Jesus sinners doth receive.

Oh, how blest it is to know: Were as scarlet my transgression,
It shall be as white as snow By Thy blood and bitter Passion;
For these words I now believe: **Jesus sinners doth receive.**”

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.