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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
June 21, 2020  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Hosea 5:15-6:6

Hymns: 11:1-3; 324:1-2,5,8, 310:1-3, 6; 307

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

Sermon Text: Matthew 9:9-13

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.

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

<sup>12</sup> When Jesus heard *that*, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>13</sup> 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, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Guilt by association.

I think we are all familiar with the concept of "guilt by association." People will draw conclusions about who are, about what kind of person you must be by looking not only at you, but at

those with whom you associate. In our text the Pharisees were certainly attempting to besmirch Jesus' reputation because they saw Jesus entering the house of a tax collector and dining there, not only with the one social reprobate but with a house full of them.

Now the Spirit of God is going to teach us a lesson about "Innocence by Association." In the world that doesn't happen quite so easily, even if one were to call on character witnesses for one's own defense. But with Jesus, well, with Jesus it is a different story. Jesus' innocence comes to those who associate with Him. His innocence comes to those who put their trust in Him. In our text we see --

### **THEME: Jesus Befriending Sinners.**

We see Jesus --

#### **I. Calling Sinners to Repentance.**

Jesus was in Capernaum on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. There was a great deal of commerce in this small city. It was a sort of hub for trade as well as for the Galilean fishing industry.

Capernaum was to be Jesus' adopted home town as well as the home town of the fishermen Peter and Andrew, and James and John, all whom Jesus called to be His disciples.

Because of the flow of commerce in Capernaum there were Roman toll booths in the city. Taxes were collected for many things, and based on valuations set by those who collected the taxes. The system was corrupt with contractors bidding for the job for entire districts of the empire. They then hired managers to gather taxes from different cities, who then hired the tax collectors to man the toll booths they set up. Everybody got their cut, and including the Jews who manned the toll booth. Because of the corruption and association of serving the Romans, these tax collectors were reviled and excluded from the local synagogues. They were regarded as being among the lowest elements of society, along with prostitutes. They were sinners. I mean, they were really sinners.

But what do we read in our text? Jesus passes by one of these men, a man named Matthew, sitting at his tax office where he customarily ripped off the people for Rome as well as his own personal gain, and Jesus says to Matthew, "Follow Me!" Others would have little regard for such a low down character, maybe even showing their disdain by spitting on the ground as they passed by, but not Jesus. Jesus invites this sinner to follow Him, and Matthew did just that. Matthew got up and left the toll booth and followed Jesus. Why would Matthew do that? Why would Jesus condescend to reach out to a man like Matthew with this invitation, which was actually a command, "Follow Me!" The thing is, that is what Jesus is all about. All about what? Jesus is all about befriending sinners. Much later in His ministry, at the home of another of these despised Roman tax agents Jesus said very plainly, "*The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.*" (Luke 19:10)

We see that Jesus' call has power. He draws sinners to Himself for salvation. This is not apart from the gospel. Jesus was well known in those parts. This was very likely not Matthew's first contact with Jesus. Surely Matthew had heard of the healing Jesus had done for Jesus did many miracles in Capernaum. He may also have heard Jesus' lessons concerning the kingdom of God, lessons about God's love and forgiveness that Jesus preached, even if Matthew had been excluded from entering the local synagogue.

What is also evident is that Matthew must have been aware of his own sin and guilt. Jewish society would have gotten the point across that any hope of forgiveness was lost to this type of sinner. It didn't matter what they had heard about forgiveness, that message was for others, not for those like Matthew or his friends. But then Jesus befriended Matthew, calling Matthew to follow Jesus.

Matthew got up and followed Jesus. He left behind a very lucrative job and followed Jesus. Jesus words, "Follow Me" changed everything for Matthew. Matthew was included in the mercy of a forgiving God. He was included in Jesus' circle of friends, not as the impenitent thief, but as the repentant sinner. Jesus doesn't call sinners to continue on in sin that leads to death. Jesus calls sinners to turn away from sin and from the evil of this world that they

might turn to Him, and follow where our Savior leads. Jesus calls sinners to eternal life.

That is the gospel call Jesus extends to each of us as well. As well as we know our sins, and if we are honest about our own lives, we know we sin, Jesus knows our sin even better. Jesus knows who we are. We sin every day. We have sinned against the Lord and we are not worthy of being associated with someone like Jesus, the holy and righteous Son of God. Indeed, we have done shameful things. We have sinned against our neighbor with our own selfishness and greed, and allowed our own bad behavior to hurt others around us. And yet Jesus befriends us. Jesus calls out to each of us in His mercy, a mercy that endures forever, and says to me, a sinner, “Follow Me!”

His words still have power. His words have the power to move hearts so that we also can get up and leave behind that which previously had owned our hearts and lives. Even if it be a lucrative income or a pleasurable lifestyle. Jesus calls to us so that we might turn away from sin that leads to death, and walk with Him on the paths of righteousness. Jesus takes our sins away. He brings us God’s love and forgiveness so that we might be holy and righteous before God. Only Jesus can truly bring us **Innocence by Association**.

“Oh, draw us ever unto Thee,  
Thou Friend of Sinners, gracious Savior;  
Help us that we may fervently  
Desire Thy pardon, peace, and favor.  
When guilty conscience doth reprove,  
Reveal to us Thy heart of love.  
May we, our wretchedness beholding,  
See then Thy pardoning grace unfolding  
And say: ‘To God all glory be:  
My Savior, Christ, Receiveth me.’ ” (The Lutheran Hymnal 386:5)

But of course we know that this wasn’t the end of the story. Indeed it was but the very beginning of what was to be a long friendship between Jesus and Matthew. And the nature of that friendship is determined by Jesus’ willingness in --

## **II. Accepting Sinners as His Associates.**

Jesus went to Matthew's house. Jesus accepted a dinner invitation in the house of a man with a bad reputation. Matthew was a Jew serving as a Roman tax agent, a revenue collector for the nation's oppressor! The other disciples went along with Jesus into Matthew's house. These men were all synagogue members and a good number of them lived right there in Capernaum. They knew who this sinner was! And then to top it all Matthew invited a whole bunch of other local tax agents and other disreputable people to join them for dinner! These disciples themselves had to be wondering, "What was Jesus thinking?" It surely came as no surprise when they were challenged by the Pharisees who were so careful not only to observe the law, but to make sure they were not in any way tainted by sin or guilt, not even, or especially any guilt by association.

What was going on? It is important for us that we understand. Matthew was demonstrating his appreciation of God's grace in a most wonderful way. He wanted his friends to know Jesus. And yes, Matthew understood exactly how vile his friends were. He was one of them, or had been one of them. Because of that Matthew understood their need to know Jesus and the grace and mercy that is to be found in Jesus.

Jesus lays out the truth for us in His response to the Pharisees. Who goes to the doctor? Especially think now of urgent care, or the emergency room. It is not the person who is feeling fine! No it's the person who feels sick, sick enough to be more than a little concerned. So it is with the one who needs Jesus. It is the one who knows sin and has the guilty conscience that needs Jesus. These are the ones to whom Jesus brings the healing that only Jesus can bring, the mercies of God in the forgiveness of sin. It is the greatness of the Lord's compassion that moved Him to go to Matthew's house to sit and minister to tax collectors and sinners, to befriend sinners.

What we see in Matthew is his appreciation for the gospel. He desired to share that which relieved him of the burden that lay on his heart. What we see in the Pharisees is the absence of appreciation for the gospel. They felt no need for the gospel. They were offended by Jesus' association with sinners. They saw it as

defilement. One must keep the law! Jesus reminded the Pharisees that God desires mercy more than sacrifice. Self-righteousness and keeping yourself outwardly pure isn't the way of the Lord. Mercy and love leads us to bring the gospel we love and appreciate to others who need Jesus.

Let's take a moment here to imagine a scale of appreciation of the gospel. Pharisee at 0; Matthew at 10. Where are we? In a couple minutes we will be going to the Lord's Table to receive the body and blood of Christ given and shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins. That ought to tick up our appreciation a point or two. Where are we? At a 10, with great appreciation, or a 5 or 6 with a bit of complacency, or are we at 1 or 2 and in danger of possessing a disregard for the wonder of grace that comes to us in the Gospel? Take a moment and look in your heart, and look at your life. Then let us follow Matthew's example. An incredible thing has happened in our lives, Jesus has befriended us! **Jesus has befriended us! How awesome is that!**

Hear the Savior's call and follow Him. Hear the Savior's call and be His witness, His associate who is eager to tell others of the mercy and grace that is found in Christ Jesus who has come to call sinners to repentance.

**AMEN.**

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