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St. Matthew

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
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“Its Not *About* You, its *For You!*”

Text: Matthew 9:9-13 (Ephesians 2:4-10)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

It seems to be the case that those who wrote the four Gospels that are contained in the Scriptures do not include themselves in their own writings. Mark never tells us who he is, except for a veiled reference to a young man in the Garden of Gethsemane. Luke provides a brief introduction of who he's writing to, but doesn't include any biographical details about himself. And John insists on not even mentioning his own name, instead using a phrase to refer to himself that could be true of any disciple – ***“the disciple whom Jesus loved.”*** . . .

But then there's Matthew. Matthew the tax collector, who does include his own story in his own Gospel. He didn't have to. We would have known about him from the others who also include this story. But for some reason, he finds this story about himself so important that he breaks the unwritten rule that Evangelists don't talk about themselves, and includes this story anyway. And so a good question for us to ask today is, **why?** And without beating around the bush, *here's the answer: it is because Matthew does not consider this story to be about himself.* He's in it, but its not about him! Its about His Saviour, who came to a no good, cheating, lying, stealing, despised, outcast, dirty, rotten, not welcomed in the synagogue, tax collector like himself, and saw not someone who deserves to be thrown away, but someone worth saving. And that, Matthew knew, is something that needs to be told – even if he has to talk about himself to do it.

And that's important, because its something that we do not always realize – that this story that we heard in the Holy Gospel today is not about Matthew. And the reason we don't realize that is because the way our world is today, we tend to make *everything* about ourselves. As someone once said, this is the ME generation. Its all about me – My needs, my wants, my rights, my happiness, my advancement, my feelings, my well-being – its all about me, and what others can do for me, and what I can get for me. It is the spirit of our day and age: “me-ism.” And none of us are exempt. We want a certain lifestyle. We want our 15 minutes of fame. We want a certain respect and notoriety. We want credit. We want to be noticed. . . . And this is not only in the world! “Me-ism” has

even crept into the church. And so we hear very often today that I want to worship how I want. I want to sing the hymns I want. I want to hear what I want to hear. Or in other words, its all about ME.

And since that's the way we are, and that's the spirit of our day and age, we tend to project that kind of thinking back into the Bible, and therefore also onto Matthew, and think that therefore this story must be about him. And that it is about how he followed Jesus. And therefore we should do the same. . . . But by focusing on Matthew, one of two things is the result, neither of which is good. We either beat ourselves up for not being like Matthew, and not following better and being more committed, **or** we end up like the Pharisees – patting ourselves on the back for how well we are doing; or congratulating ourselves for all that we've given up, just like Matthew; or priding ourselves for our dedication in following Jesus, just like Matthew.

And so here's the point, that the Evangelists knew but which is sometimes hard for us to learn: the Scriptures are not about you. Oh, they *apply* to you, and *teach* you about you, and *show* you that your sin is about you. But they are not about you. **They are about your Saviour, Jesus Christ, and all that HE has done for you.** He is the center, not you. . . . And if we look at the Holy Gospel for this St. Matthew's day in that light, from that perspective, only then will we understand how wonderful these words are for you and me.

And so when Jesus calls out to Matthew ***“Follow me”*** and Matthew rises and follows Him, the point is not how great Matthew is, and how much he left behind in order to follow Christ, and how we should do the same. No, Matthew wants us to understand the strength and power not that he had, but the strength and power that the Word of God had upon him. How two simple words *instantly* changed his life – and not only here and now, but changed it for eternity. How Matthew, the no good, cheating, lying, stealing, despised, outcast, dirty, rotten, not welcomed in the synagogue, tax collector became St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist. It had nothing to do with anything in him. It had everything to do with the mercy and love of Jesus, who called him out of his darkness and into the light of his forgiveness and life.

For when God speaks, things happen. And so when in the beginning God said, ***“Let there be light”*** there was light. When God says ***“The virgin will be with child”*** she is. And when God in Jesus said to Matthew ***“Follow me”*** he did. God's Word does what it says, and created in Matthew the saving faith he needed to get up, leave what he had, and follow Jesus.

And so too for you and me. The fact that we are here today has nothing to do with

anything in us, how much we've given up, or how dedicated we are. It has everything to do with Jesus and the power of His Word. The One who called us out of the darkness of our sin and into the light of His forgiveness and life. . . . And so even though Jesus may not walk past you today and speak directly to you as He did to Matthew, it is still nevertheless Him calling to you and working in you and giving to you the saving faith that you need. Only this He does today not directly or immediately, but through earthly things, through means – through the Scriptures and through the Sacraments. And so even though the Scriptures are read and spoken by human mouths and the Sacraments administered by human hands, they are in reality the word and work of your Saviour, calling you by His Gospel, and giving you all that you need. For still today, when God speaks, His Word does what it says. And so when He says “**Your sins are forgiven**” they are. When He says “**This is My body**” it is. And when He says “**I baptize you, you are My child**” its true. But not because of you or me – but because of the mercy and love of your Saviour who wants you. Who wants no good, cheating, lying, stealing, despised, outcast, dirty, rotten, not welcomed in the synagogue, tax collectors and sinners . . . like St. Matthew and you and me.

But even more than that – simply having Matthew follow Him was not enough for Jesus. It might have been enough for Matthew, receiving the acceptance and call of such a great man, and as he would learn, of God Himself! But it was not enough for Jesus. No, He wanted more than that. Jesus didn't want Matthew just to follow Him, **Jesus wanted to serve the tax collector**. And so we read of the feast that then took place. The feast of many tax collectors and sinners. A regular “den of iniquity!” And that “den of iniquity” is all the Pharisees could see, and so questioned Jesus as to whether He should be there! Whether He should be “consorting” with the likes of those people! . . . And so great is Jesus' answer! Saying to the Pharisees, “***But where else should a doctor be?***”

Indeed, where else?

And so the fact that Jesus, the great physician, is here, among us as He was with Matthew and his friends, *should teach us something about ourselves*. That we are not the nice, respectable, refined people we like others to think we are! No, we are regulars in the “den of iniquity!” Regulars in indulging ourselves and our desires. Regulars in ignoring God's Word and doing what we want and like. And regulars in denying it and wanting others to praise us and tell us how good we're doing! . . . And yet, because of who we are – not in spite of it! – but because of who we are, Jesus is here. And here not to scold us and berate us into doing better – although we certainly should! – but here to serve us tax collectors and sinners. To come into this “den of iniquity” that we call our lives and world, and rescue us. And so He came, and He keeps coming. **To serve. To serve** us on the cross, taking our sins and iniquities off of us and putting them on Himself. **To serve**

us by taking our punishment in our place. **To serve** us by going through death and rising from the dead, so that He can take us with Him through death and into life again. **To serve** us with His Word. **To serve** us at His Table. And in all of these ways, **to serve** us with His forgiveness and give us the gift of faith. The doctor, coming to us who are sick and diseased with sin, and giving us the medicine of immortality.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

That verse is what Matthew’s story teaches us. It is a story not about Matthew or about his example for us, but about how great is our Saviour. How great His love and mercy. How great His grace and forgiveness. How great His transforming service, that He could change a no good, cheating, lying, stealing, despised, outcast, dirty, rotten, not welcomed in the synagogue, tax collector named Matthew, into St. Matthew. And how He has come to serve and change us also, from sinners into saints. . . .

Now, we’re not there yet! No, we still sin, and we won’t stop as long as we live in this “den of iniquity” on this side of eternity. But that’s why Christ, our Saviour, is still here. For in Christ, while we are still sinners, we have also been made saints. And so we live. Saint and sinner at the same time, but beginning to live that life that Christ has given us. Beginning to do the good works that God has prepared for us. Beginning to live as who we are, as sons and daughters of God. And so we sin, and we confess. We fall, and we are raised. We come, and we receive. We receive the forgiveness and healing of our doctor. Your doctor, who is here **for you**. Your doctor who sees in you as He saw in St. Matthew, not a sinner who deserves to be thrown away, but a sinner worth saving. And so He did!

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.