

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – Feast of St. Matthew, September 20, 2015, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 9:9-13

“Follow Me”

When we look at the men that Jesus chose to follow Him as disciples, we find some very interesting things. Jesus didn't go to Rome and preach before Caesar; Jesus didn't go to Athens and debate philosophy with the scholars there; Jesus didn't appeal to the rich or famous or even to the popular; but instead Jesus chose men and women to follow Him that might be called the forgotten or cast off of society. Jesus chose regular people with regular jobs such as fishermen, some even had careers like Matthew as the tax collector, which made him hated and despised by all.

I can just picture Matthew sitting in his tax collecting booth, having chased after the god of money for years and feeling that it offered no lasting hope. He goes to work every day, as a man detested by the Romans because he is a Jew; shunned and rejected by Jews because they see him as a traitor – working for the enemy. In his job as tax collector he is not allowed to worship God or to present sacrifices for forgiveness of sin at the Temple. He was considered by many to be worse than a Gentile or even a dog. Try to imagine how he must have been feeling. The pleasure of his money isn't making him feel good anymore. His life seems to be without meaning and purpose. He isn't loved by anyone. Nobody looks him in the eyes anymore when they talk to him, if they talk to him. His gold keeps him company, but nobody else wants to! Matthew hears that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by, the man who heals people and makes them whole. I can just hear his thoughts “What will Jesus say to me?” Will He lecture and reprimand me before the crowd? Will He judge me as I deserve to be judged? All of these things must have been racing through his mind. So just what did Jesus say? Jesus said to Matthew simply, *“Follow Me.”*

I've often wondered just how Jesus chose His disciples. We know that He didn't go to the Pharisees school of Theology to interview the senior class – as pastors might do today. He didn't pick the scholars to walk with. Scholars didn't even know they needed Jesus. He came as a physician, to heal us of our sickness called “sin.” Matthew knew he was sick.

- Jesus called people who understood their need; and Jesus still does this. You know one of the reasons God gave us the Law was to show us just how much we don't measure up – we are NOT perfect and we never will be. Jesus chose people who were willing to humble themselves and ask for forgiveness. To seek it. People who would ask for direction and guidance, and provision. We see Jesus do this with Peter in Luke 5:8 – when the boats were filled to the brim with fish by Jesus' direction to throw their nets off the other side of the boat – Peter fell to his knees and said *"Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"*
- Who could forget the story of Zaccheus – which takes you to the second lowest part below sea level on the face of the earth – a city called Jericho. He had heard that Jesus was coming to town. Zaccheus was also a tax collector – as a matter of fact – the chief tax collector in Jericho. Zaccheus was a short man who climbed a sycamore tree just to

see Jesus. When Jesus came by He called out to Zaccheus - a man who was despised, and said "*Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.*" (Luke 19:5). And then Jesus went and had dinner with him and his friends.

- The Apostle Paul writes in 1Timothy 1:15-16 "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example to those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life.*"
- Jesus came to call people who were willing to follow Him – not just for a day or for a moment – but on a full time basis. Jesus looked right into the heart of Matthew that day and saw a man who was really ready to follow Him. It did not matter at all that he was a tax collector. But more important than that, he was deeply loved by God and he was of infinite worth to God – just as we are. The Pharisees wouldn't look at him, but Jesus looked at him and loved him. Jesus really and truly wants to transform us, but He doesn't do it against our will. I have said this before and I will say it again! Jesus is a gentleman – **who would never force His love on anyone!** Please open your Pew Bibles to page 1647. Let's look at what it says in John 1:11-12 "*He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet, to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.*"
Wow – Can you just imagine how that must break the very heart of God, when someone chooses to go their own merry way and to reject Him? And yet, He allows a person to do that if they so choose. God won't force you into heaven.
- Jesus came to call people to share His good news. You know – when something big happens in your life – what is the first thing you want to do? You pick up your cellphone and you want to tell somebody, or you go to your neighbor's house and you bang on their door or ring their bell and you tell them about it. You might even go on Facebook and share your news, maybe even including pictures. When something good happens you want the world to know – let's face it – we are all doing it! In verse 10 from today's Gospel - Matthew immediately invites his friends to his house to meet Jesus and dine with Him. They just happen to be the worst of the worst in the society that he lives in. It was the fringe – possibly what might look like some pretty sleazy people, and the criminals and the homeless and those that lived in the gutters that Matthew knew. So, he calls them all together and he has a festival. He's celebrating his new life in Christ. He wants others to know what has happened to him. If he had an iPhone he would have been texting, or calling or putting it on Facebook! He doesn't keep the Gospel to himself.
 - The Pharisees should be rejoicing – but instead heaven was rejoicing that day. Scripture tells us that the angels sing over one who comes to know Christ. Yet, the Pharisees are indignant over what Jesus was doing.
 - Jesus saw the worth of the man and looked beyond his faults.
 - The Pharisees worried about uncleanness and law following.
 - Jesus was concerned about mercy and compassion. During the last few weeks we have talked about mercy: mercy is NOT getting what you deserve. Instead He

wanted to give you grace – things that you don't deserve or don't expect – like salvation, when you get to know Him!

- The Pharisees were concerned about their reputation in the community.
- Jesus was concerned about the lost souls in the community and how to reach them.

Matthew, the tax collector is evidence that God does not give up on people. It doesn't matter to God how far you have walked away from Him - as long as you are willing to repent and turn and to follow Him. With His help we can have that same attitude towards those we meet.

John 3:16-17 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him."* In God's eyes there are no lost causes; no worthless people; no people that He does not love. Those who believe in Him and ask His forgiveness – receive the infinite benefit of His endless love!

There is more to the story – God extends His love – and then what? Do you receive the gift that God wants you to have – without strings attached? Believing in Him means hearing the words *"Follow Me"* and doing just that – just like Matthew. Give Him permission to change you – to transform your heart to be more like His. Jesus is the Light of the World and He wants to share that light with everyone. Right after John 3:16-17 – Jesus has more to say - *"Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."* *"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil."* (John 3:18-19)

God is not looking for perfection in people (He knows He won't find it) – don't ever forget that Jesus walked in our shoes and witnessed the same stress and strains of this earthly existence –except He did not sin, and He was tempted by the same things we are. He above all understands what it is like to be human! All Jesus asks is that we invite Him into our lives by believing in Him as the Son of God, and to open our hearts so that He can make us more like Him. Remember His words to Matthew – *"Follow Me!"*