

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
June 17, 2018  
Matthew 9:9-13

In Christ Jesus, Who has called us sinners to **FOLLOW HIM**, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In looking through some Help Wanted ads, I saw these notes attached, “must be able to work weekend hours;”--- “must be able to stand for long periods and lift 50 lbs;”---“experience helpful but will train;”---“only 18 years old and older need apply;”---“only those with their own transportation.”

Well in our text this morning Jesus puts out a call for employment in His kingdom and He too attaches a notice:

**SERVANTS OF THE WORD WANTED: ONLY SINNERS NEED APPLY!**

We find two major points in our text:

**I: Jesus came to call only SINNERS to repentance and salvation.**

**II: Jesus came to call only REPENTANT SINNERS to work in the Word.**

In our text Matthew is telling us how he was called. With two words, **“Follow Me”** Jesus not only associated with an outcast, but called this outcast into full-time work in the public ministry. From the words of our text we thankfully see that the Savior came to save those and only those who need saving—**sinners!**

Before we go any further we need to review again the tax situation in Israel. Israel was ruled by the Roman government. As subjects to Rome the Israelites had to pay taxes to the government. This the Israelites hated to do for they despised the Roman government’s oppression of them as a people. The government farmed out the actual collection of the taxes to rich Romans. These wealthy Roman citizens would pay to Rome a fixed amount in the public treasury. Whatever they then collected over and above the amount they paid to Rome was their profit. These Roman citizens would then in turn hire people of the province to go around the area and do the collecting. Of course they too received their profit from whatever amount they collected over and above the set amount. It was kind of like the pyramid schemes we hear of today. Everyone making something off of the ones who purchased a product.

One person would then be appointed head of an entire district. Zacchaeus was one such chief tax collector. Under someone like Zacchaeus would be the common tax collectors. Matthew was one of them. Nearly everything was taxed—durable goods—like clothes, tools, animals; consumable goods—like food and firewood, property, homes, even slaves. This legalized extortion made the Jewish people even more deeply despise their fellow Jews who worked as tax collectors. Respectable and patriotic Jews refused the position of tax collector and only those of low ethical character and low moral standards were attracted to this kind of work. That is why tax collectors were often grouped together with open, unrepentant sinners; people who lived in clear violation of God’s moral law.

Matthew must have heard about Jesus. Perhaps he had seen Jesus perform miracles, or heard Him proclaim that He was the Messiah; for from our text we see that Jesus only used one Greek word, two English words, to convince Matthew to leave his lucrative, yet sinful lifestyle and occupation behind and live for Jesus. The Holy Spirit must have worked in his heart an acknowledgement of his sins, realizing that he was not doing what God commanded. Perhaps he had thought that there was no way that he could be acceptable in this Rabbi’s eyes. But remember what Jesus had said to Zacchaeus, **"ZACCHAEUS, MAKE HASTE AND COME DOWN, FOR TODAY I MUST STAY AT YOUR HOUSE."** Then after Zacchaeus confessed his sins and professed his faith in Jesus the Lord said: **"TODAY, SALVATION HAS COME TO THIS HOUSE, BECAUSE HE ALSO IS A SON OF ABRAHAM; FOR THE SON OF MAN HAS COME TO SEEK AND TO SAVE THAT WHICH WAS LOST."**

Imagine how surprised Matthew must have been when Jesus said to him, **“FOLLOW ME.”** Surprised, perhaps shocked, but also overjoyed. We are told that Matthew left all and followed Jesus. In gratefulness for having called him Matthew invites Jesus to his home. Jesus has no qualms about this. He goes and sits down to eat. Notice who Matthew also invited to this banquet to eat with him and to meet Jesus—yep, his fellow workers, other tax collectors and public sinners. Matthew was already

working as a missionary for Christ's kingdom. He wanted these tax collector friends of his and these other sinners whom he knew to come into contact with Jesus so that they too might know Jesus as their Lord and Savior from their sins. What a tremendous faithful response by Matthew.

But there were some who did not look at it this way. The Pharisees, those whited sepulchers, despised Jesus for accepting such an invitation and eating with such sinners. No doubt they felt justified in their accusation of Jesus being a disreputable rabbi for eating and fellowshiping with such low life as these publicans.

What a difference in the hearts of the Pharisees and in the heart of Jesus. Pride, conceit, arrogance, self-righteousness filled the hearts of the Pharisees. They thought themselves to be holy when compared to these outcast sinners. But Jesus knew these sinners were in need of forgiveness and reached out to them with compassion and forgiveness. And Jesus clearly revealed the reason for His eating with these people—He was not thereby showing that He condoned their lifestyle; thought it was OK to continue in this walk of sin; No, Jesus condemned their sins, as well as the Pharisees sins of lovelessness. He was leading these sin-sick souls to spiritual health. He was calling these sinners to repentance and salvation. Jesus drives the point home by quoting the words of our first Scripture reading from Hosea 6:6: **FOR I DESIRE MERCY AND NOT SACRIFICE.** Then He says, **"BUT GO AND LEARN WHAT THIS MEANS."**

Jesus' call is the same today. He says to you, He says to me, sinners that we are: **"Follow Me."** His call is for all sinners. **"COME TO ME, ALL YOU WHO LABOR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN---**laboring under a heavy load of sins, burdened by a guilty conscience--**"COME TO ME, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST."**

Thank God that the righteousness of Jesus manifests itself not in separating Himself from sinners, but by calling sinners to Himself through repentance. If Jesus' heart was like the hearts of the Pharisees, He would be all alone in heaven. No one, not even these so-called righteous Pharisees would be good enough to occupy His home.

And neither are we. By nature we are no different from the tax collectors and prostitutes of Jesus' day or the public sinners of our day. We too are not perfectly healthy—meaning perfectly holy. We too are sick with sin. We need a physician, a heavenly Physician who has the right remedy in fact the only remedy for our dreadful, terminal disease of sin. The remedy of course is the perfect life, and atoning sacrificial death and resurrection of our Substitute Savior. **THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST, HIS SON, CLEANSSES US FROM ALL SIN.**

Jesus comes today to call you and me to repentance and salvation through His Word. He also comes to call the rapist and the murderer; the homosexual and the abortionist; the gambler and the extortioner; the prostitute and the adulterer; the liar and the thief to repentance and salvation—not by condoning their sins, but by condemning sin, paying for its punishment and guilt, and by leading us sinners to see the terrible effects of our sins, leading us to Godly sorrow over them and a trust in Him for full and free forgiveness.

The two-fold sin of the Pharisees was first denying their own sin and secondly denying Jesus' saving love for them and others. What holy irony that Jesus did not choose as His disciples any of these religious Pharisees but instead chose a former tax collector; despised and hated by his fellow Jews to be His servant of the Word on a full-time basis; as an apostle of God and an author of one of the four Gospels.

And that is our second point.

## **II: Jesus came to call only REPENTANT SINNERS to work in the Word.**

Why were the Pharisees and for that matter the Scribes and Priests not fit for work in the kingdom with God's Word? Because they felt they were the righteous ones; they felt they were the ones who did not need a physician. They felt they were the ones who were healthy, good enough to enter eternal life on their own merits and works. That is why they rejected Jesus and despised the others.

On the other hand the one who has been led to see his lost, sinful condition like Matthew, and is led to see in Jesus His Savior from sin, that one is well qualified to work in the Word. The Spirit has not only called him to be a child of God, forgiven of his sins, but also a servant, to work in God's kingdom with the Word.

If a person would have to be good enough in order to assume his/her duties as a pastor or Christian

Day School teacher in God's kingdom using the Word there would be none, for none is good enough, none is perfect in God's eyes. God does not call perfect people into His ministry. He calls sinners, sinners that have been led to repent of their sins and have been led to believe in Jesus for their salvation.

Why sinners? So that they in thankful joy can proclaim to other sinners what Christ proclaimed to them, **"FOLLOW ME."** Jesus saved me a sinner and He has saved you also!

There is a saying, **"Birds of a feather, flock together."** The Pharisees looked upon Jesus as a despised Rabbi because He associated with public sinners. These sinful birds flocked together and were looked down upon. Well we today are like those birds of Jesus' day. We too have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. We too have been led to follow Jesus as our Lord and Savior and we too flock together as like-minded Christians in this congregation to confess our sins and profess our faith as repentant sinners in Jesus. We flock together around His Word and Sacraments to be fed and mutually edified and strengthened in our faith life.

May we "birds of a feather" reach out to other birds like us; fellow sinners in our families, at school, at our jobs, in our neighborhood and be like Matthew, invite them in, invite them to come to our spiritual banquet held every Sunday and to eat of the heavenly food found in God's Word. For Jesus indeed did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Hallelujah!

Amen.