

Pentecost 3A (Proper 5)

Matthew 9:9-13

June 11, 2023

Let's begin this morning by recognizing and acknowledging what we all believe and know to be true, but don't like to admit. Jesus saw everything you did last week. He heard every word you spoke. He also knows everything you should have done but didn't and everything you should have said but failed to. As shameful as that would be, it gets worse. In addition, he heard every thought you had and knows every desire that sprung up in your heart. With all of that in mind, why would Jesus call you to faith? Why would he want you to be among those that bear his name? Why would Jesus want to make you members of God's kingdom? Why would Jesus call you to follow him? Those questions and the many variations of those questions can pop into our minds every once in awhile. Perhaps especially when we are feeling guilty about something those questions can loom in our minds and hearts. What is your answer? What is your answer to the question: Why did Jesus call you?

Throughout the years, dangerous error has crept into the church because people have answered that question incorrectly. Those erroneous answers all have one aspect in common: they all try to answer the question by pointing to the one who is called instead of answering the question by completely emphasizing the one who does the calling. In writing to the Corinthians Paul pointed out that the answer to the question we have been considering does not lie in a person's wisdom, in how influential a person is, the answer doesn't lie in the family into which one is born.

Today we look at the people Jesus calls. Even though we are looking at the people that the Savior calls to himself, I want you to note how everything hinges not on the ones who are called, but on the one who does the calling. In other words, even though we are talking about the recipients of Jesus call, pay close attention to how Jesus gets all the credit for everything that is done through that call. So let's look at the people Jesus calls. You see that they are sinners who need his forgiveness. You see that they are forgiven so they follow him.

Our text really revolves around the purpose of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The Savior himself summarizes that in the last verse of our text when he says, ***For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*** In the eyes of the Pharisees and other Jews, Matthew was the cream of the crop of sinners. He was a tax collector. He had placed himself into the employ of the hated Romans. Rome hired Jews to tax Jews. As long as Rome got the money she demanded, everything was just fine. Tax collectors were outcasts because they would overcharge the Jews when they taxed their durable goods, consumables, slaves and land. The tax collectors would inflate the price and tax it accordingly. Once Rome received the money it demanded, the tax collector made a handsome profit on the rest. This is the world in which Matthew actively lived. This is Matthew, the sinner, who desperately needed Jesus' forgiveness. This is Matthew, the sinner, that Jesus graciously called.

Yes it was Jesus' purpose to seek and to save those who were lost. It was Jesus' will to call sinners. It was Jesus' mission to come into the world to save sinners, even the worst of them as Paul, the former persecutor testified. The adulteress at Jacob's well was one for whom Jesus came. The murderer and insurrectionist who hung next to Jesus is another one Jesus called. You and I are also among those sinners that Jesus came to seek and save. You and I are among those sinners that Jesus graciously calls. First, before anyone even gave a thought about you Jesus came to earth to live perfectly in your place. Close to two millennia before you were even born, Jesus gave up his life to forgive your sins. He graciously called you to faith. He used the miracle of baptism to create life in hearts that were born dead in transgression in sin. He used the miracle of baptism to transform enemies of God into children of God. In his precious Word, Jesus continues to call sinners who need his forgiveness as he daily and fully forgives all your sins. He absolves you of your guilt through others. He proclaims your forgiven status through friends and family members, pastors and teachers. Do you see the people Jesus calls? Rejoice that he came to save those who need saving. Rejoice that he calls sinners who need his forgiveness. Rejoice in the power of Jesus' gracious call.

The power of such a gracious call is evident in Matthew's response. He got up and followed Jesus. Then, he threw a banquet where his friends could meet the Savior who had found and called him. Matthew's dinner also stimulated hostile responses from the Pharisees. We can imagine the great burden that Matthew carried under the rugged, businesslike veneer of a tax collector. He had been excluded from the synagogue. He was an outcast among his people. His sins weighed heavily upon his conscience. Could he hope for a word of pardon from his teacher?

Who can understand the depth of the riches of God's grace? He calls such a man as Matthew to eternal life! How much more amazing that Matthew is called into the public ministry! This grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is exemplified in Matthew's autobiography. Just look at the people Jesus calls. They are forgiven so they follow Jesus.

Matthew got up and followed Jesus. Not only did he follow Jesus but he left everything behind to follow Jesus. He left his counting table and found in Jesus' command the promise that those who follow his call will never suffer need – here or in eternity. The call to forgiveness is also a call to service. Matthew was called to a specialized field of work. He was called to be one of the 12 disciples. In Matthew's day, disciples chose their masters. Matthew however, did not choose Jesus. Jesus chose Matthew. With the call to discipleship and apostleship came the implied promise that the one who called Matthew would provide him with everything he needed. Matthew began his work at home, in his own community, among his associates. Though we don't know much about his active ministry, this we do know: Under God's direction this tax collector wrote the first gospel. Only God knows how many "sinners" Jesus called to himself through the book of Matthew. Jesus made Matthew "God's gift" to a world full of sinners.

Who can understand the depth of the riches of God's grace? He calls such people as you and me to eternal life! How much more amazing that Jesus calls you to follow him by serving! This grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is exemplified in your life. Just look at the people Jesus calls. They are forgiven so they follow Jesus.

You don't follow Jesus so that you can be forgiven. You have been forgiven so you follow Jesus. You don't struggle against the temptations the devil lays in your path so that you can be forgiven. You have been forgiven so you struggle against those temptations. You don't carry out your responsibilities God has given you so that you may be forgiven. You have been forgiven and now you graciously employ your abilities to carry out whatever task your Lord gives to you. You don't come to church to earn your forgiveness. You have been forgiven and now you joyfully come to worship the one who forgave you. You don't study the Bible to earn your forgiveness. You have been forgiven and now as you follow Jesus you willingly sit at his feet so that he may increase your trust in him. You don't give your offerings to be forgiven. You don't give your offerings to gain Jesus' favor. You don't even give your offerings simply to meet a financial obligation. You have been forgiven so you respond by following Jesus and giving cheerfully of your firstfruits.

Think of your place in life. Mother, father, grandfather, grandmother, son, daughter, employee, citizen, member, pastor, friend or neighbor. No matter who you are, no matter what you do, you are a sinner who needs forgiveness. Your Savior came to live and then give up that life and then take that life back again to win forgiveness for the world. By faith, you are among those Jesus has called. Just look at the grace of Jesus as it shows itself in those people he calls. Jesus has forgiven you. Jesus has given you life in his name...both life here on earth and life eternal. Jesus has secured your name in the Book of Life. Look at the people Jesus calls. They are forgiven so they follow him. Joyfully and thankfully follow him who so graciously called you. Amen.