



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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June 1, 2008  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Matthew 9:9-13  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Hosea 5:15-6:6  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 119c  
Second Lesson: Romans 4:18-25  
Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13

### **Follow Me**

God's Call

His People's Response

So how are you enjoying the presidential campaign? Doesn't it kind of seem like at times it goes on forever? Doesn't it feel like we've already had year after year of campaigning? It hasn't been all that long, but it sure feels that way. All kinds of things flow out of the presidential campaign and other campaigns for elected office. I found a website the other day as I was sitting at the computer that was titled "Follow the Money." You could click on any state in the union and you could see who contributed what to local offices for elections for state, for presidential campaigns, going back any number of years. Someone had to put an awful lot of time and energy into doing something like that. You could do it for anyone. As I sat there and looked at it a little bit, I found it kind of interesting and I thought, "What's the purpose?" I suppose part of the purpose is to find out who is trying to skirt the rules for contributions, right? Don't you have something like that so you have kind of a watchdog group over things like that so you don't have people breaking the rules, some lawbreakers, and so you can find out who is breaking the laws, who is using different corporations, who is doing things like that that are against the law. It's kind of an interesting concept; follow the money to find the lawbreakers.

But here, in what I just read to you, it's kind of the other way around. Jesus found the lawbreaker and said to him, "Follow me." He followed the money to find the lawbreaker that was sitting at the tax collector's booth. Then he said "Follow me." He has found the lawbreakers that are sitting in the pews this morning and in the pulpit, and he has said to each and every one of us, "Follow me." He didn't look for us to accuse us and to make us guilty. He found us because we are guilty and he wants to make us innocent. That is the glorious thing about the gospel of Jesus Christ. It takes lawbreakers, it takes the guilty and declares them "not guilty."

Then we also see how not only does Jesus do that for us, but he also longs to do it through us like we see him doing it through Matthew, a guy that is grouped in with "tax collectors and sinners." That is the phrase that goes together all the time. How would you like your job to be a synonym for sinful wretch? That was Matthew's life, right? The Romans, when they conquered an area, would not collect taxes themselves. They would have different groups that would form a corporation, bid on it and for a certain amount of time, be in charge of collecting the taxes. Then they would hire locals to oversee areas and then have tax collectors under them. It seems like Matthew was one of these guys that oversaw an area. They would collect the taxes on all different kinds

of things. A lot of times what they did was inflate the prices, collect extra, and that's how they made their money. So, on a number of different levels, they were hated.

First of all, they were not patriots. They were helping the occupying force, right? That makes you kind of a pariah, unloved, unliked, hated. And secondly, they were thieves. They would extort this out of people and they were viewed as thieves. So that's why "tax collector and sinner" went hand in hand. Quite often they were put out of the synagogue because of their association with the Romans because of what they were doing. The Pharisees would not even eat with people like this or be caught dead with people like this because they were outside of the synagogue and eating was an expression of oneness, of fellowship at a certain level that they would just not do. So when they see Jesus eating with Matthew and other tax collectors and other sinners, they of course are upset. But Jesus was there eating because he came to Matthew that day for a purpose.

Matthew evidently heard of Jesus before. He maybe heard him preach, had seen miracles or heard others talk about him, but evidently before that day the Holy Spirit had been working in his heart. Here is a guy that was no doubt longing for something to relieve the burden of guilt that he was carrying around; every day he was reminded that he was hated. Every day people would not associate with him. Every day he would be looked down on as one of the terrible people. He carried a burden of guilt, I would expect, that either he had learned to completely ignore, or it was crushing him. When Jesus calls him to "Follow me," you get the idea it must have crushed him because we are told he got up and left things right at the table and followed Jesus. His was a call to apostleship that day I suppose you would say—to be one of the apostles. God worked in his heart and led him to believe that the answer to his sins was not ignoring the fact that he worked for the Romans, not blaming others, not making different excuses, not rationalizing that someone has to do it so "I guess I might as well make the money." The answer to his sins was Jesus. He trusted Jesus was the One the Old Testament prophets had said would come and be the Lord, our righteousness—that he would be the One Jeremiah had spoke of that would be righteous in his place. He trusted that. He rejoiced in that.

I don't know that you and I, as we walk around every day, are "social outcasts" feeling the guilt of our sin the way Matthew did. Maybe at times in our lives we've done something that made us feel like a social outcast. Maybe we've been beaten down. Maybe we made some really poor decisions and others could see it, that our sin became more public, and we felt to a degree like an outcast. The truth of it is, we are all right next to Matthew as sinners, aren't we? We all need God to come to us and say, "Follow me." For many of us, he said it to us before we could say anything to him. In our baptism, he came and called us by name. We were baptized into Jesus' righteousness, into his life and death, into his resurrection, and we were raised up to live a new life because God gave us the gift of faith at our baptism. God called us to follow him when we were unable to follow him, when we were unable to do anything. His mercy came to us when we were undeserving and not even wanting that mercy. He saved us while we were still sinners. That's the glorious nature of the gospel.

And you and I, when we have done something where we are feeling the immensity of our guilt, when it's crushing down on us like someone putting lead weights on our shoulders, God comes to us again and says, "Follow me. I have taken away your sin. Don't carry it alone. Take it to my cross." That's where it was taken away. And that's where we are forgiven.

When our guilt is overwhelming us, hopefully we all know to flee to the cross and we can taste the sweet flavor of being forgiven. Yet, at the same time, there are times when you and I are in danger of carrying around a different kind of guilt that we don't notice, that we don't feel as a weight bearing down on us. At times you and I have the danger of spiritual apathy. I've taken it for granted that God loves us and will forgive us. And because it's there all the time, we don't treasure it as much because maybe we look around and see someone else and think, "They are a worse sinner than I am." You know; the people we like to gossip about and assume things about without finding out by going and talking with them directly. Then we assume the worst because we are sinful wretches in our nature. We talk about it and we spread the rumors. Then we feel a little bit better about ourselves because "that's not me. I'm not that bad."

That's when God comes and says, "Follow me." Kind of in the same way that he said it to the Pharisees. He tries to wake us up then with his law as we will see.

It seems that Matthew, when it came to following Jesus, wanted to do something for Jesus, so he has him over for a meal. Matthew evidently was a good Lutheran because he knew that food went together with serving his God. But not only did he have Jesus over, it seems as though he got the word out that "there is a guy that you guys need to meet; a guy that loves me in spite of who I am; a guy that wants to be with me in spite of who I am, when many of the religious leaders of our town don't want to be around us. So, follow me and come and meet Jesus." Because the tax collectors and "other sinners" were there—prostitutes, thieves, murderers—I don't know. The outcasts, the social outcasts were there—the people you wouldn't be seen with. Jesus, no doubt, had the opportunity to share the gospel with them. Matthew had the opportunity to share the gospel with them. No doubt there was electricity in the air because of knowing that there was hope for lost and condemned creatures and that God did send his Son to be their Savior as well as the Savior of others. There had to be this sense of joy, this sense of electricity in the air.

But then someone wanted to throw a bucket of cold water on it, didn't they? The Pharisees come and say, "Why are you eating with those guys? You don't hang out with those guys. If you are a Rabbi, if you are a teacher, that's not where you go. Why is your teacher doing something like this? What is wrong with him? Doesn't he get it? Doesn't he know that they have been put out of the synagogue? They aren't the people you eat with!" So because Matthew had said "Come follow me," it presented Jesus not only the opportunity to share law and gospel with the tax collectors and sinners, but he also then had the chance to share the law with the people that really needed to hear it, the people that thought they were "all that" spiritually and didn't need anything like a Savior.

Jesus said to them, "It's not the healthy that need a doctor, it's the sick. The spiritually sick need a Savior." They recognize their spiritual weakness. They recognize that they are broken and beaten because they see their sin. You guys might think you are healthy, but if you want to find out a different diagnosis about your spiritual condition, go think about what Hosea said. God said, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." The Pharisees were all wrapped up in the sacrifice and what they were doing, right? They did this. They did that. They did this. They did that. They knew the law. They knew the prophets. They were the spiritual muckety-mucks of the area. They were doing the sacrifice, but the mercy part they missed because they had their noses up in the air about "how could you hang out with people like that?" That wasn't mercy. That was the opposite of mercy, wasn't it?

So now Jesus not only had the opportunity to share the gospel with the lost and condemned but with those who didn't know they were lost and condemned. He had the opportunity to share the law with them. That had to be a slap in their face because they would have known Scriptures. They would have known that Jesus was hitting them where they lived and that he was slapping them across the face and saying, "You guys are missing the point." They might not have accepted it, but maybe some did. Maybe some felt the sting of the law and came back.

Like you and I when we fall into that spiritual sleep. Maybe the Lord doesn't come to us directly, but maybe he sends a Christian friend, a Christian neighbor who has to slap us in the face and wake us up out of our spiritual apathy so that we see our sins and our desperate need to be healed by the spiritual doctor that is Jesus, so that we see it's not who we are. It's not what we do. It's not all the goodness that we have and that we are. It is the goodness that is God and how he loved us and how he came to us and how he showed us mercy. So now, because he has shown us that mercy, we are woken up from our spiritual slumber. We see the love that God has for us and we know that as we go back to our baptismal waters where our sins were washed away, our God says to us, "I don't care what you have done or who you have hurt or what opportunities you have let slip by. I lived in your place. I died in your place. I forgive you completely and absolutely."

That's what leads us to not want to focus on sacrifice or on what we do, but on mercy. That leads us to focus on living for God, sharing our faith, living our faith so that we have the opportunity to share our faith and go to the people that we know. And I'll bet you we all know spiritual outcasts, people that don't know that they are on the road to hell, that might not know that they are spiritually sick, and you and I have the opportunity to go to them as they struggle with the things of life, as they worry and as they fret. Then we have the opportunity, not to force our faith on them, but to say "You know what really helps me? What really helps me is the trust and the confidence I have that my God will be with me because he loved me enough to die for my sins. He loves me enough to be with me through uncertainty about hell, through uncertainty about finances, through uncertainty about whatever it might be that troubles us."

You and I have the answer, and you and I are God's voice to go and call others to "Come follow Jesus."