

The Festival of St. Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist
St. Matthew 9:9-13
September 21st, 2025
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald P. Dulas

Many Publicans and Sinners Came

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sermon Text:

“And it came to pass, as He sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with + Jesus and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto His disciples, ‘Why eateth your Teacher with the publicans and sinners?’ But when He heard it, He said, ‘They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what this meaneth, “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice:” for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my + lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

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

My dear friends, our Lord + Jesus, the Christ, had just healed a paralytic. This is the paralytic we hear about on the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity Sunday every year. He is the one whose friends, because of the crowds, let him down into the house where the Lord was by removing part of the roof, and lowering him down in front of the Lord + Jesus. With that paralytic our Lord addressed his most pressing need. That need was not his paralysis, even though most people would say that was the affliction that was most obvious. No, my friends, our Lord healed him of the affliction that troubled him most—his sins. Our Lord tells the paralytic, “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven.” Some accused the Lord of blasphemy, because only the Lord God could forgive sins. After healing the man of the paralysis, as proof that He could forgive sins, the crowds marveled that such authority had been given to man.

This is a brief summary of the text that we will hear more in-depth on the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity Sunday. That the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew chose to place that healing in his Gospel before relating the circumstances of his own calling is interesting. There was a man, a paralytic, who’s most pressing need appeared to be his palsy, but our Lord sees the man’s heart and knows that it is his sins that cause him pain and sorrow. Considering that the Jewish society considered those who had various afflictions a result of some sin they did, makes this case even more revealing. For the man was probably hounded by the scribes and Pharisees in their preaching about sin, and found no relief from them.

Then comes the calling of St. Matthew, the Apostle and Evangelist. He is another one who the scribes and Pharisees offered no relief for sin and transgression. The Pharisees in today’s Gospel reading are appalled by the Lord + Jesus for eating “with the Publicans and sinners.” These were the

ones who the Pharisees believed could not be forgiven of their sins. These were unworthy of forgiveness in the eyes of the Pharisees. They only saw the outward lives of these individuals. They did not see their hearts. But our Lord + Jesus sees their hearts. He sees the heart of St. Matthew, a Publican and sinner. This is a phrase that the Gospel of St. Matthew uses often "Publicans and sinners." It is often used by St. Matthew when recording the words of our Lord when He is talking about the impenitent, that those people should be treated as "Publicans and sinners." That is the impenitent should be rejected, as long as they do not repent.

This is done to lead them into repentance. Nobody wants to be cast away, to be rejected. This casting away is meant to wake the person up to the seriousness of his transgressions, so that his heart would be pricked with the Law and he would be led into contrition and sorrow over his sins. This contrite heart can then be led into faith with the comforting words of the Gospel, with the promise and administration of the forgiveness of their sins.

This is why our Lord is eating and drinking with Publicans and sinners. He is there to offer forgiveness of sins to those who have humbly confessed their sins, and desired the forgiveness that the Pharisees would not give. St. Matthew is one of those individuals. Like the man sick with the palsy, whose real affliction could not be seen, no one could see the repentant heart of St. Matthew. The Pharisees only saw a Publican, a tax collector. They did not see the heart of the man who was only fulfilling his vocation.

In all fairness, tax collectors were known to be unscrupulous. They were charged with collecting the tax revenues for the Roman government. They were known for their thieving and overcharging in order to line their own pockets. They were despised among the Jewish people, not only for their thievery, but also for allowing themselves to be employed by the Romans, the nation the Jews hated, because the Romans had the rule over them, and they desired to be free. So when the Pharisees see the Lord + Jesus, the man many believed to be the Messiah, the Anointed One of the Lord God, eating with "many publicans and sinners" they are shocked and appalled that someone who was supposed to be a prophet was eating and drinking with these people.

The fact that St. Matthew records that at this meal "many publicans and sinners came" reveals how poor the preaching of the scribes and Pharisees was. These people found in the Lord + Jesus someone who could forgive them of their sins. And make note, my dear friends, that this is not a situation like the antinomians like to preach about. The antinomians are those who want to do away with the Law of the Lord God. They would say, "we do not need the Law anymore since the Christ came." They talk about everyone being a sinner, and that forgiveness is for everyone. Both are true statements, but their conclusions are flawed. For our Lord forgives *repentant* sinners. Those who desire to amend their sinful lives and with the help of the Holy Ghost, live lives worthy of repentance. Our Lord does not desire that people remain in their sins. To remain in one's sins is to ignore the Commandments. The Lord gave us those Commandments, not that we could find salvation in doing them, but that we could do His will, to obey the Commandments and show our love for Him and our neighbor.

Was every publican and sinner that came to this dinner repentant of their sins? Probably not, there are always a few tares among the wheat. But they were there where they could hear the Lord + Jesus, hear His preaching and He could, by His preaching, turn their stony hearts into hearts of flesh. By His preaching He could lead the publicans and sinners into repentance, that is, into contrition and faith in Him. It had happened with St. Matthew; it could happen also with those who he invited to join him at this meal he hosted. For our Lord desires mercy and compassion upon all men.

For we are all indeed sinners, and our Lord + Jesus has fulfilled the requirements of the Law, and atoned for our sins, and the sins of the whole world upon the tree of the holy cross, so that those

who believe on Him, and turn from their sins to faith in Him and His works and merits, might have forgiveness of all their sins. This is why we come to this holy house. We come to sit down with our Lord + Jesus at His meal and eat and drink with the other publicans and sinners in this place. We have not come to glorify our sinfulness; to glory in how sinful we are, but we have come to confess our sins, and receive absolution from the Pastor as from the Lord God Himself. We have come to rejoice in our Holy Baptism, and to kneel at this altar to receive from our Lord + Jesus His very own Body and Blood given in bread and wine, for the remission of our sins.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us rejoice that our Lord + Jesus does not reject us like the Pharisees did the many publicans and sinners who came to eat with the Lord, but He shows compassion upon us. He sees our hearts, that we have been afflicted with sin and shame, and have found no comfort from the things of this world. Our Lord + Jesus comes to us in our affliction and with His preaching of the Word heals our sin-sick hearts by preaching into our ears that we have forgiveness of our sins. Having heard this great news, we can joyfully come to this altar and receive the gift of our Lord + Jesus. We can joyfully take comfort that we have been forgiven of our sins. We can joyfully come to this place, and join with other penitent sinners, and sing the praises of our Lord for having won for us forgiveness, and that He has also bestowed it upon us.

Let us also continue to live lives worthy of repentance. Let us not wallow in our sin and shame, but resist the temptations sent our way, and living daily in prayer and study of the Word of the Lord God, resist the devil, and grow in wisdom and knowledge of our Lord, so that we may love Him by obeying His Commandments, and do those works of the Law that benefit our neighbor as our Lord commanded. For we have not been redeemed by our Lord's suffering and blood so that we might go on living in our sins, but that we might by the help of the Holy Ghost, purpose to amend our sinful lives earnestly and sincerely. For like St. Matthew, the Apostle and Evangelist, our Lord + Jesus has called us out of the place of toll to follow Him, and to sit down with Him and many publicans and sinners to hear our Lord's preaching that we might take comfort in Him and be granted salvation. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord + Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same + Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ + Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!