

Matthew 9:9-13  
"Shaped by Jesus"  
Pentecost 2 (Proper 5A)

June 11, 2023  
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.  
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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The Pharisees said to Christ's disciples, "***Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?***" (Matthew 9:11)

That's a good question. Why is Jesus – *a Jewish rabbi* – sitting at a dinner table with tax collectors and sinners? Doesn't "***bad company ruin good morals***"? (1 Corinthians 15:33) Could Jesus be there condoning their sin? Well, that is what the Pharisees' question is implying.

I have heard it often said that Jesus "hung out with sinners" or He "hung out with prostitutes" during His earthly ministry. Is that what Jesus is doing here? Is that what Jesus is being accused of by the Pharisees?

Yes, exactly! The whole point of the Pharisees' question was to slander Jesus and His reputation to make it appear as if Jesus tolerated, accepted, and even embraced sinful behavior. But is that what is going on here? Is Jesus tolerating, accepting, and embracing sinful behavior?

Let's go back to what led to Jesus being invited to this dinner with tax collectors and sinners. Earlier that day, after healing a paralytic, Jesus comes up to Matthew as he is collecting taxes at his tax booth. Jesus walks up to Matthew and says two words to him, "***Follow Me***" (Matthew 9:9). Amazingly, Matthew picks up his things and follows Jesus. He didn't think twice. Jesus spoke those words of invitation and he just dropped everything. Matthew abandoned his business and gave up his livelihood. He was willing to lose his life, so that he may save it. Jesus spoke and Matthew followed without any hesitation.

So, just as Jesus invited Matthew to follow Him, Matthew thought it well to invite Jesus to his home for dinner. Jesus brings with Him His other called disciples and Matthew invites over some of his friends and associates. This is where things get interesting. This is where the sinful world latches on and joins the Pharisees in accusing Jesus as accepting sinful behavior.

The sinful world likes this Jesus who tolerates and accepts sinful behavior. You see, sinful man would rather shape Jesus than be shaped by Him. Sinful man would rather see Jesus as an apathetic hippie who wandered around Galilee flanked by drunks and hookers. Sinful man imagines Jesus sitting on the roadside making small talk and watching the world pass by. With a Jesus like this, He is no longer the Shepherd, but a sheep. This is exactly the kind of Jesus that Satan prefers.

But that is not the real Jesus. Christ came to save sinners and not to lead sinners to eternal destruction in hell. He came to give eternal life, not eternal death.

So, as Jesus, His disciples, and Matthew's other invited guests were eating together, some Pharisees walk by and notice this odd arrangement of people. First off, a respectable Jew would never eat with such people. After all, as I said earlier, ***“bad company ruins good morals.”***

As the Pharisees were watching this, they made their accusation, but they didn't have the courage to speak to Jesus directly, but instead spoke to His disciples, ***“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”***

Even though Jesus was not addressed directly, He answers them, ***“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick”*** (Matthew 9:12). Jesus is there to treat the sickness of sin, not to condone the sin. Here, Jesus speaks about why He is there. Here is there as a physician. Physicians treat sick people. These people are sick, and their sickness is sin. They are not free of guilt. Jesus is in no way saying that these people are not responsible for their sin. Jesus is there because they are sick and cannot heal themselves. They all need rescuing from their sins.

Here, Jesus tells of His mission: ***“For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners”*** (Matthew 9:13b). He has come to rescue every single person from all times and all places of their sin, since there is no such person who has no sin.

But who are these people that have caused so much offense to the Pharisees? First off, it's always good to remember that ***“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”*** (Romans 3:23a). But this isn't exactly what the Pharisees were after. For them, “sinners” were a much narrower group of people. In particular, tax collectors and prostitutes for these were the people who flagrantly and publicly violated the Law of God.

You see, tax collectors had the reputation for being dishonest and unrepentant Law breakers, and most tax collectors would scheme on getting wealthier in the process. Pharisees considered them among the worst of sinners, since they were both traitors – *in working for the hated Roman government* – and liars, since they cheated people out of their money.

So, Matthew – *a tax collector* – was about as likely a candidate for discipleship as Saul of Tarsus, who had taken the lead in the bloody persecution of Christians before Jesus called him and transformed him into one of the pillars of the Church, the Apostle Paul.

The sin of tax collectors was greed. They had a reputation for not trusting God to provide, so they just fleeced and extorted the people. They had the reputation as those who had the love of money. For this, the Pharisees considered them among the scum of the earth.

What about you? Could you be among these men holding too tightly to your money? We've all seen how rising inflation has cut into our income. We can't get the same value for material goods as we used to. The volatility of the stock market may cause you to worry about your investments and retirement accounts. Money isn't going as far as it used to. You may be feeling anxiety about money: "Am I going to have enough?" When your mind goes there, you begin to hold tight to your money, or it takes hold of you tightly. We sin.

Closely related to the tax collectors would be the prostitutes. They too, are considered the scum of society. This sin involves selling your body for money or acceptance or drugs. It could be about anything. But more is going on with this than sexual immorality. Underneath prostitution, we find the loss of the sanctity of marriage. Sex sells and buys, instead of being a sacred gift for a husband and wife.

Now, you are likely not a prostitute, but we all live in a time when sexuality and nudity are exploited, exposed, and explicit for us to see every day of our lives. How difficult it is today to keep our desires, our urges, our minds, and our hearts chaste. The internet, movies, television programs, and even commercials, tempt viewers to keep on looking, even fantasizing about what counts as beauty. We are bombarded with these images day in and day out. They catechize us, but in the wrong way. We sin.

With the lowest of the low there at the table, there are likely some people there speaking filthy words. Speaking profanity. This is no different than today. Foul language flows into our ears and perhaps flows out of our mouths. What do you say in anger when you lose your temper? How quickly we lash out with mean words, hateful words, words that God never wants us to speak. We sin.

There at that dinner table reclining with Jesus are what the Pharisees consider the worst of the worst of sinners. Dishonest men, scandalous women, worriers, and Law breakers. There at that dinner table is Jesus sitting with you and me.

Jesus is there not to accept or tolerate any sinful behavior, but to treat that sinful behavior as any good physician would with any sickness. Jesus said, ***“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners”*** (Matthew 9:12-13).

Jesus is not there to merely accompany them, but to bring them to repentance. He is there to heal their sin. These are all guilty people who want to be rescued. Jesus is there to say, ***“The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”*** (Mark 1:15) and ***“Sin no more”*** (John 8:11). Jesus is there because these sinners recognize that they are spiritually poor, and spiritually miserable. He is there because they recognize their personal sinfulness and unworthiness. He is there to give them the remedy for their sins: His forgiveness.

Jesus is there for the Pharisees too, but they don't see any need for a physician for their souls. They are so deluded that they don't think they need to be saved, since they wrongfully regard themselves as spiritual healthy.

The Church is the hospital for sinners and not a club for the righteous. Jesus is the Great Physician who knows just what the sick need – His merciful forgiveness. Jesus never came to an adulterer to approve of adultery, or to the tax collector to approve of his greed and corruption. No, He came to purge them of their sins – and us of ours.

He came to treat their illness. He came to treat their sin. He listened as they confessed their symptoms, so that He could give them the remedy.

The Law exposes that ***“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”*** (Romans 3:23a). We deserve only damnation since not one of us is innocent. Thanks be to God that we have the remedy for sin, justification by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ***“whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith”*** (Romans 3:25).

Today, and at each Divine Service, Christ is here for you! He is here in this hospital known as Prince of Peace Lutheran Church. He is here to shape you through repentance and faith. He hears your cry for forgiveness. And He comes with the remedy – His Medicine of Immortality, His Word and His Sacraments. Through these Means of Grace, He gives you food to eat as we inwardly digest His Word and receive His forgiveness through His Body and Blood broken and shed for you, so your sins would be forgiven, and your faith strengthened. Then He says, ***“Go and sin no more!”***

Whatever your sin, Jesus has taken that sin to the cross for you. He suffered, died, and rose in your place, so that through repentance and faith in Him, you could receive the soothing remedy of His forgiveness that only the Great Physician brings. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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