

June 5, 2005
Pentecost 3
Youth Confirmation

“Calling the Guttermost to Serve to the Uttermost”

MATTHEW 9:9-13

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. ¹⁰ While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" ¹² On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. ¹³ But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

About a year ago, there was a picture in the National Geographic magazine of a man from India from the lowest class in society, cleaning out the sewers and gutters in Calcutta. His body was covered with filth. He spent much of his life in the gutters and sewers.

This morning we want to focus our attention on another person who was living in the gutter, the gutter of sin. The man's name was Matthew, or Levi, a tax collector who made his living cheating other people by charging them more for taxes and keeping part of the money for himself. What amazes us is the way Jesus took this person in the gutter and called him to utter heights of glory. He called Matthew to serve as one of the twelve disciples, one of the highest positions of honor and glory the world has every known.

I have often thought of this picture of that man in India, the gutter cleaner covered with filth. That is what I once was as I was born into this world covered with sin and unacceptable to God. Then in his grace and mercy God called me to follow Jesus. He called you to follow Jesus. He takes the guttermost people and puts them into the uttermost positions of honor and glory for his kingdom. That's the story of God's grace that we see in front of us as we listen to Jesus called out to Matthew, "Follow me."

1) The Lord calls the least likely people from the gutter

Jesus found Matthew, the tax collector just the way he was in the gutter. "As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collectors booth." It says, "Jesus went on from there." Jesus was always going on from there, over here, and then on from there, looking for people who were lost that he could rescue and bring into his kingdom. In Ezekiel 34 the Lord says, "My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth." Then the shepherd goes on to say, "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them...I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered."

What kind of people does Jesus seek? He seeks out the people that are lost, those who are in the gutter of life, without hope and without God in their lives. That was Matthew. "He saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the tax collector's booth." It does not say he was

standing near the tax collectors. He was sitting, doing his business, collecting the taxes, overcharging the people, giving the Roman government what it required and keeping back part for himself. I think you know the name of another tax collector in the Bible. Remember his name? Zacchaeus. Scripture says of him that he was wealthy. Every indication is that Matthew was from this same class of people who made their living in the gutter by cheating other people.

Jesus came to Matthew and said, "Follow me." These were the same words Jesus used to call the fishermen from the Sea of Galilee to leave their nets and be with Jesus full time. "Follow me." It says, "Matthew got up and followed him." Matthew must have known who Jesus was and the love he had for sinners. The Holy Spirit was already working faith in his heart to believe. Jesus words, "Follow me" were so powerful they grabbed a hold of Matthew and completed the process of taking him from the land of darkness and bringing him into light.

The words that Jesus offers us are so powerful they can change our lives and lead us to follow him even if our lives have been spent living in the gutter of sin. "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." "My sheep hear my voice, and the follow me, and I give them eternal live and no one will pluck them from my hand."

The Christian church is filled with people who were born into the gutter of sin and lived their lives in that gutter. One of the greatest missionaries of the Christian church was the Apostle Paul. His early life was spent persecuting Christians and putting them to death. It was Paul who wrote, "By the grace of God I am what I am." The man who wrote the words of the hymn we just sung, "Amazing Grace" described his own personal life. John Newton was born into a home with a Christian mother who nurtured him in God's Word, but then she died. He went to live with his dad aboard ships and turned away from Christ to live the wanton life of sailor. He became involved in bringing slaves from Africa to England. Then the voice of Jesus that called out to him as a child called again to him. He started hearing that voice even more as he read the Bible. So on fire did this man become for Jesus, that he became a pastor and even preached to the queen of England and helped England abolish the slave trade with Africa.

What did you look like when you were born into this world? What did God see in you? The answer is found in Ephesians 2 where it says, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air. Not only we born dead, but we were born into the gutter of sin, without God and without hope." Sometimes little babies are born banged up from coming through the birth canal at birth. We are born dead in sin. Then Ephesians goes on to say, "But because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions." Lying in the gutter, without hope, covered with sin, rescued and made alive by Christ. That's the life story of every Christian.

2) The Lord uses the least likely people for his utter glory

What amazes us even more about God's grace is how the guttermost people are used for the uttermost glory and service in Jesus' kingdom. Matthew is a good case in point. He

left his cheating and stealing to follow Jesus. He invites Jesus to have dinner in his home. Notice what it says, "Many tax collectors and 'sinners'" came and ate with him and his disciples. I don't think Matthew was throwing a big farewell dinner to say good-bye to his fellow dishonest friends in the tax-collecting world and celebrate how much money he had made cheating people. He is inviting them to his home one last time to introduce them to Jesus. The man who was living in the gutter was used to lead other gutter people and lost sheep into the loving arms of Jesus the Good Shepherd.

This morning I ask you, "What is the greatest honor and privilege that can ever be given to Christian who follows Jesus?" What is the greatest honor and privilege the Lord Jesus could give to our two young men, Kevin and Justin, as they give their vows to the Lord and become communicant members our congregation? The greatest honor and privilege is that of leading others to Jesus as Matthew did. The Lord has not called us to sit around and wait for his return with nothing to do. "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." I was once a nobody, but now I am somebody, telling everybody about One Body that can save anybody. We bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have important work to do as we can see from the example of the Pharisees who were hypercritical of Jesus having dinner with tax collectors and sinners. "When the Pharisees saw this, they asked the disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?'" How many times was Jesus not criticized for sitting down and eating with tax collectors and sinners! Jesus once told three stories or parables to illustrate how important lost people were to him. There were the powerful stories of the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son. Each story was intended to show the joy among the angels of heaven over one sinner that repents. Everything in a culture today says, "God helps those who help themselves." Even in the church there are those who say that God rewards the people who try their best to be religious. Only in Jesus do we have a Savior who sits down with tax collectors and sinners and invites them to find forgiveness in him and strength to live a new life.

Jesus even loved these so-called righteous people who thought they had it made with God because they were trying to earn eternal life with their good works. He tries to help them by saying, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners." Jesus wanted these people to see was that they needed help and they were just as sick as the tax collectors. He wanted them to go home and think about a verse from the Old Testament where the Lord said, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice." What God wants more than anything else is for people to acknowledge and accept the sacrifice he made for their sin, not try to offer their own sacrifices to try and make themselves acceptable and worthy.

Why has the Lord left me here on this earth? What plans does he have for these two young men ready to make their vows and live their lives for Jesus? We have been taken from the guttermost to the uttermost heights of honor and glory to help other people hear the voice of Jesus calling to them. Someone needs to tell people they are sick, really sick, and really in need of help. Someone needs to tell them the little band-aids of trying to make sacrifices and do good things simply aren't going to make the problem of sin go

away. Someone needs to tell the world there is a cure for sin and it is found only in the blood of God's Son who died for us and rose again to declare us forgiven and at peace with God. Romans 10 says, "How can they called the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news!'"

Look at your feet. You are not longing standing in the gutter. You are now standing on holy ground, washed clean by Jesus and dearly loved by your heavenly Father. Jesus has called you to follow him to the highest heights and carry his name to others you are still in the gutter. As we sing, "Take my feet and let them Swift and beautiful for Thee." "And Matthew got up and followed him." That's the story of your life and mine. The guttermost are lifted up to the uttermost. Come follow me. Follow me to the highest heights. The voice of Jesus is stilling calling you and me. Amen.