

June 11, 2023

St. Matthew 9:9-13:

“Of All The People”

- I. The Disreputable.
- II. The Other Side.
- III. Of All The People

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

St. Matthew 9:9-13

Dear Friends in Christ,

Years ago, a lady by the name of Joann C. Jones wrote,

“During my second year of nursing school our professor gave us a pop quiz. I breezed through the questions until I read the last one: ‘what is the first name of the woman who cleans the school?’

“Surely this was some kind of joke. I had seen the cleaning woman several times, but how would I know her name? I handed in my paper, leaving the last question blank.

“Before the class ended, one student asked if the last question would count toward our grade. ‘Absolutely,’ the professor said. ‘In your careers you will meet many people. All are significant. They deserve your attention and care, even if all you do is smile and say hello...’”

Don't you find it interesting how we size up people? Often judge them based on little or no information. Judge them based on gossip and slander. Judge them based on where they work or live. So, for example, what would go through your mind if you found yourself in a casual conversation with someone you didn't know while waiting in some sort of line and you discovered the person worked for the IRS. So, like, what thoughts are passing through your mind right now? Maybe you're thinking . . .

OF ALL THE PEOPLE

I. The Disreputable.

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him (v.9).

Of all the people, a tax collector. God takes on flesh, comes to earth, and instead of landing in a major metropolitan area and seeking the prestigious to walk with Him, He walks the dusty roads of Israel and chooses a tax collector to be His disciple. Talk about upsetting the apple cart! The elitist Pharisees will ask, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners (v.11).” Listen to this insight by New Testament commentator, R.C.H. Lenski:

These collectors were hated and despised by the Jews, both because they served the Roman oppressors and thus lacked all patriotism, and because of their greedy expectations, for they usually demanded all they could get in order to enrich themselves. Naturally, only men of lower types of character took positions of this kind.

That's quite an insight into certain people of that time, isn't it? Something to think about: “Naturally, only men of lower types or character took positions of this kind.” You know, thieves and cheats; the disreputable, defined as “not considered to be respectable in character or appearance.” If you really think about, “God so loved the world...” it is absolutely shocking! He chose this man to be His disciple and to write this great Gospel! Our Lutheran Confessions state:

This Christ calls all sinners to himself and promises them refreshment. He earnestly desires that all men should come to him and let themselves be helped. To these he offers himself in his Word, and it is his will that they hear the Word and do not stop their ears or despise it. In addition he promises the power and operation of the Holy Spirit and divine assistance for steadfastness and eternal life (Tappert, The Book of Concord, Formula of Concord, 495.8).

II. The Other Side.

But, of course, there's this perspective, the other side . . .

And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And (again) when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners (vv. 10,11)?"

I have never forgotten a conversation about God's love in Christ I had with a man in the early years of my ministry. His facial expressions were telling me that he wasn't buying anything I was saying. After inviting him to a Bible Investigation Class He stated, "I know a lot of people who go to your church and some of them are not the best people in the world." I wanted to ask, "How many do you know?"

Do you suspect that we ever come off that way with others? "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners.?" By the way, would you like to know what I said to the man who said, "I know a lot of people who go to your church and some of them are not the best people in the world?" I said, "You're right. They're like their pastors; sinful and undeserving of God's love." That's when the conversation really began to unravel. The man was traveling the road of the self-righteous.

And there's something else that often comes to mind. Quite some years ago now, a professor at the UCLA Medical School is said to have his students answer the following question:

Here's the family history: The father has syphilis. The mother has TB. They already have had four children...The second has died. The third is deaf. The fourth has TB. The mother is pregnant. The parents are willing to have an abortion if you decide they should. What do you think?

As you probably guessed, most of the students opted for abortion. The professor responded: "Congratulations. You have just murdered Beethoven!" The incident betrays the often hasty judgments we make about others. It is also an indictment against abortion. Today, the professor would have been fired.

Hasty judgments against others; self-righteous thinking that some are more deserving of God's love. The words God gave to Jeremiah are most appropriate: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it (Jer.17:9)?" It is incredible, isn't it: God so loved us that He gave Jesus to walk the path to a bloody cross to heal the sin sick heart - ours?

III. Of All The People.

So, we come back to Jesus' words, "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 (9:12,13)."

Make no mistake about it, when it comes to those who see themselves as deserving of God's love, God's word is clear: "For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rm.3:22b,23)." He confronts the Pharisees with their arrogance and self-righteousness. Jesus came for those hurting, filled with guilt from sin, traveling through one consequence after another because of their sin, fearful of what's to come in their lives here and after death.

How could anyone substitute the reason why Jesus came into this world when the clear Word of God through Isaiah says this:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgression; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace; and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned - everyone - to his own way; and the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all (Is. 53:4-6).

Paul wrote to Timothy, "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost (I Tm. 1:15)." Then remember this: Paul confessed to the Lord after his conversion, "...in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.' And he (the Lord) said (to Paul), 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles (Acts 22:19-21).'"

And there you have it! Of all the people, Paul, a man at one time filled with hatred and violence against God's people, an accomplice to murder of the innocent. And before us Matthew, behind the tax collectors' booth, a man not opposed to greed and thievery. And we can't forget Peter, the man who swore up and down he would never betray his Lord.

And **Of All The People** there's you and me. As the Word says, "While we were still weak, ...while we were sinners...while we were his enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son (Rm 5:6.8.10)." **We**, of all people, know Jesus. We pray God help us to direct those we know who don't know.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott