

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Matthew 9:9-12 (NIV)

⁹As 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. ¹⁰While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" ¹²On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

Theme: Do You Need the Doctor?

A few years ago, I figured that I am over 40 years old now and should probably have a check up. It's covered by the insurance, so I figured that I would have it done knowing full-well that the doctor would find nothing. I was wrong. I got a telephone call that my cholesterol was very high, but it could be taken care of with some medication.

When we are sick or have a health problem, it is wonderful to hear the words that it can be treated. It is great to know that there is a cure or at least something that can keep our condition in check. That goes for us spiritually also. We are sick with sin, but there is a cure, and He is Jesus Christ. Today, I would like to ask then whether you need the Doctor.

I. Sometimes we don't even realize that we are sick.

The pharisees never realized how sick they were with sin. They thought that they were righteousness. They didn't think that they had ever committed any sins. They would try to show off their righteous acts to God and other people, so that they would receive praise.

Because they thought that they were righteous, they looked down on people who were sinners. They would not eat with them, acknowledge them on the streets or do business with them. They especially hated the tax collectors both because they collabertated with the Romans and because they were thieves by charging extra and pocketing the rest. What probably bothered them the most about tax collectors like Mattew was that they had to deal with them when they had to reluctantly pay their taxes. Their self-righteousness gave them both a false confidence and a lack of any mercy for those who needed forgiveness.

Sometimes we don't realize how sick with sin that we are. We look at our lives and think that we are pretty good. We are at least better than a lot of people that we know. We might even like a little bit of fanfare when we do some of our good deeds. We would like a little bit of appreciation. Sometimes, we might even crave a lot of it.

When we pride ourselves in our deeds, we are very quick to find the faults of other people. This often happens in our families. It seems as though the next World War breaks out among the kids, but no one is able to accept any blame. It's always someone else's fault. But it doesn't only happen with the kids. It happens with their parents too. When husbands and wives begin to fight, each has a long list of what the other is doing, but when they are asked how they contribute to the problem, they

can't list a single thing that they have done. Often we know that we have guilt, but we look for excuses. "They did something to us first. We are only getting them back." "I had no other choice." Sometimes we find it hard to forgive people who have hurt us. We bear grudges, and we refuse to forget. Self-righteousness gives us a false confidence before God. Our hope is in what we have done for God and how much we have loved Him. But it also makes us unforgiving and unmerciful to those who we think are not as good as we are.

II. The sick, however, are thankful for a doctor.

It must be horrible to know that there is a treatment for a sickness that you have, but you can't get it. Thousands of people travel to our country each year to be treated for conditions, which cannot be treated in their home countries. I have heard that if you go to the Mayo Clinic today, it is like the United Nations. People come from all over the world to be treated. But think of the many people who cannot afford the trip or the cost of the care. They know that there is help, but isn't not available to them.

That must be how it was for Matthew. He lived in Capernaum, the town in which Jesus did most of his ministry. He might have heard that Jesus had preached in the synagogue, saying, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Mt 4:17) However, he would have never been allowed inside the synagogue because he was a tax collector. I wonder how far his booth was from the sea, and whether he heard Jesus call Peter, Andrew, James, and John with the words, "Follow Me." Did He hear Jesus preach the Sermon on the Mount? Just before this story is when a man was lowered through the roof of a house to Jesus. Jesus forgave his sins and healed him so that he could walk. During that time, Matthew was sitting at his tax collector's booth. He knew that he was a sinner. Like all tax collectors, he had cheated people. He probably got very rich doing it. To make matters worse, many people think that because of Matthew's knowledge of the Old Testament, that he might have been an Old Testament scribe or rabbi, who had turned bad. He knew how sick with sin that he was, but he probably also thought that he could never follow Jesus. Help was there for so many people, but probably not for someone like him. But that day Jesus didn't pass by. He came up to Matthew and said, "Follow Me." Matthew didn't have to think about it at all. He jumped up and left everything and follow Jesus as one of His disciples. Even he could be saved. He could also repent and be forgiven for all that he had done.

God's mercy and grace give us that same joy. There are times when we feel so guilty. We wonder how God, our family, and our friends could ever accept us again. There are other times when it takes a good jolt from God's law to get us to see our sin. We might be like King David. The prophet Nathan told a parable to get David to see that he sinned by committing adultery with Bathseba and having her husband killed, but David didn't get it until Nathan said, "You are the man!" When we come to recognize our sin and confess it, it gives us great peace to hear those words, "The Lord has taken away your sin." "Christ has paid for it in full on the cross." He calls us also with the words, "Follow me." There is so much joy in our lives when we think of how good and gracious God has been to forgive people like us. We know that we don't deserve His love, but He gives it by His grace through our Savior Jesus Christ.

III. God fills the hearts of his people with mercy for those who need Christ and His love.

Do you know someone who needs Christ? Maybe they don't even see their need for forgiveness. Maybe they know that they need forgiveness, but they doubt that God or that we would ever accept them. God gives us merciful and forgiving hearts toward them also. When we have received the forgiveness of Christ, we stop seeing them as rotten sinners who deserve God's wrath and punishment to seeing them as people who also need God's grace and mercy. We want them to find the joy and peace that we have in following Christ as our Savior.

Do you know how sick you are? It's much worse than you could ever expect. We all have a sickness that leads to eternal death. That is why we all need the doctor. He is our Savior Jesus Christ. May God grant us a strong faith in Him that we might receive the mercy of God and be as merciful to each other as He has been toward us.

Amen.

*Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
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