

Matthew 9:9-13

Pentecost 3; June 21, 2020

What a motley looking crew were the Disciples of Jesus. These 12 men were being trained by Jesus to be his witnesses in the world. It is even amazing that these 12 men even got along, let alone be the people that Jesus would use to be his witnesses. For example: In that group of 12, there were 3 sets of brothers.

- James and John were brothers. They were known as the “*sons of thunder.*” When we think about the Apostle John, we think of him being this kind and gentle loving man. However, he didn’t have that kind of a reputation to start. Think about that picture in that word – *thunder.*
- Four of them were fishermen for sure; possibly up to seven were fishermen.
- James, the younger, and Matthew were brothers. Another set of brothers who were on the opposite ends of the spectrum. Both had descended from the priestly tribe of Levi. James was a nationalist. Matthew as a tax collector was viewed as a traitor to the nation of Israel being a tax collector. Matthew had gotten wealthy at the expense of the Jews.
- Simon the Zealot was a radical nationalist. He belonged to the political party called the “Zealots.” The Zealots were anti-Roman Government. They wanted to overthrow the Roman government, even if it meant revolution.
- Then there’s Judas, who was a thief and later would betray Jesus.

Yet, for three years Jesus ran with the same crew. They ate together. They sat around the fire together. They rode together in the same boats. Have you ever wondered how Jesus put up with all their oddities, different thoughts and opinions. Think about it – he could hear their unspoken thoughts. He knew their doubts. He knew their mistakes. He knew everything about him. Yet, he still called them to be his Apostles – his witnesses that would be sent out into the all the corners of the world. Yet, he showed them mercy. He came to be the doctor of peoples’ souls.

If there was anyone who didn’t deserve God’s mercy, it would be Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector. The Jewish people hated tax collectors. Rome had an interesting way of handling taxes. They had something much worse than the IRS. Rome would *farm out* tax collecting to ambitious locals, who bid for the job. These jobs would be very lucrative. Not only did they get to collect the taxes, they got to set the tax rate. Rome didn’t care how much tax was collected, as long as they got their share. They backed it up with the Roman army. Therefore, most Jewish people viewed the tax collector as a criminal. These guys would lie, cheat and steal to keep making more money while digging deeper into their one-time friends and neighbors. The longer they had the job, the greedier and wealthier they got.

There was a tax on almost everything.

- There was a sale tax on almost everything.
- You might have to pay a tax to cross over a river or a valley.
- You might pay a tax to use a road.
- A person might pay a tax to enter a walled city.
- There might be a tax to use a boat and enter a harbor.
- You might pay a tax to engage in certain trades.

When Matthew got up that morning and went to his tax collecting booth, he had no idea what would happen next in his life. He had no idea that on that day, he was going to get a visit from Jesus of Nazareth. Even though most didn’t like Matthew, Jesus saw an opportunity to show mercy. On that day, he was going to call Matthew to be one of his disciples. When Jesus looked at Matthew, he saw a man who needed what he had to give – mercy.

Wouldn’t you love to see the world through the eyes of Jesus? When we see unanswered prayer, Jesus saw answered prayer. Where we see the absence of God, Jesus saw the plan of God. Where we see no hope, Jesus sees unlimited possibilities. On that day in Jerusalem, Jesus saw a man who needed mercy. With two simple words, “**Follow me,**” Matthew’s life was about to change right before his very own eyes. We don’t know if Matthew had heard Jesus speak before. Did he just hear about Jesus? But on that day, Jesus was going to call Matthew out of a life of sin. When people looked at Matthew, all they could see is the sin in Matthew’s life. But Jesus saw forgiveness.

In the book of Jeremiah, God describes this mercy, this forgiveness when he says: **“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”** Think about what that means. When Jesus looked at this motley looking crew of his Apostles, he saw all the sin, all the wrong thoughts. Instead of condemning them, he says that he would take away all their guilt of sin. On that day in Jerusalem, Jesus said to Matthew: *I will forgive your wickedness and remember your sins no more.* A few minutes ago, we sang that well-known hymn: **Amazing Grace.** Think what those words say:

*Amazing grace—how sweet the sound—That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found, Was blind but now I see.*

Not only does Jesus say that to his Apostles, he says it to you and me. You know all the junk that you have done wrong, he says that through the blood of Jesus, I will remember your sin no more. When you're not feeling very good, you may go to a doctor. Why? You hope that he can fix you. He may prescribe a medication that will help you feel better; to take away the infection, etc. That's what a doctor does. That is what Jesus does as the perfect doctor – he fixes souls.

What does Matthew do when Jesus fixed his soul? He throws a party. He invites all kinds of people, who would be considered *“sinners”* in the eyes of the rest of the religious community. He wants them to have what Jesus gave him – the forgiveness of sins. That's what Jesus wants to do for you. He wants you to be his witnesses because he has had mercy on you. He would use that diversified group of disciples to take his message to the world. May he use this diversified group of people to be witnesses of his mercy. Amen.