

Sermon on **Matthew 9:9-13** – 10.17.21
St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church – New Ulm, MN – N.Scharf

Do you remember that place from your past that gives a clear window into the human condition? It was the high school or middle school cafeteria, that seedbed for stress and judgment. Do you remember the mental gymnastics that went on? Who is going to sit with whom? What table is yours? Do you sit with the jocks or the nerds or the artists or the mean girls, cool girls, athletes, leaders, or losers, or....?

Do you remember that? What was that all about? It was about “image”, right? You had to think what it would do to your image. “I don't want to be seen with someone like that.” “What will people think of me?” You had to pick the table that fit what you wanted people to think about you. Maybe you've been on both sides – at one time distancing yourself from someone or a group and closing the door, and then another - you've felt like no one wanted you.

God's Word exposes pride and fear. Usually, our reasons and excuses to NOT live hospitably all come back to pride or fear. You would've probably had no problem sharing your table with the beautiful captain of the cheerleaders or the quarterback, or letting the “cool kid” who throws all the best parties sit at your table. But the kid everybody picks on—not so much. And we're silly if we think we outgrow it. A little ambition makes the dinner invite from the boss, who can promote you, a little more attractive than hanging out with the awkward or overzealous co-worker. A chance to be seen with a well-known community leader holds a little more sway than hanging out with the person who can't seem to get their life together. Jesus invites us along and changes us and our thinking about hospitality.

Jesus invites Matthew, the scum of the earth, to hang out with him. Then, he goes to eat with him and his friends—those tax collectors and sinners. That tax collector, Matthew, teaches a lesson in hospitality too. He opens up his home so people can have a relationship with Jesus.

A God-Lived Life is a Life of Hospitality.

9 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.”

Jesus did something that seems so crazy at first, but then again, it's exactly right. He's *eating with sinners*. It starts even before the meal. He goes and calls *Matthew*, a tax collector. You've probably heard all about how the Jews hated tax collectors. Those guys worked for the Roman government. They represented the oppression of their own people. As a rule, they were dishonest and greedy and got away with robbing you to line their own pockets. They were the kind of people Jews would not allow in their synagogue and the rabbis warned you to stay away from, scum.

Jesus goes up to this man at his job. (And there's a lesson in that for us too, next time you're in a rush and don't pay attention to the grocery worker's name on their nametag.) But Jesus, he sees this man at work, a tax collector collecting tariffs on everything at the city gate. He sees more, a person that needs a relationship with God. He gives him one with a simple invitation: “*Follow me.*” He loved the man that everyone else wrote off.

It wasn't just words. It wasn't just Jesus' job. Think about it. Most of you have jobs. And in those jobs, you probably have to be nice to some people you'd rather not be. You have to spend time with some people that you would never think to invite over for tea, coffee, a beer, or a meal, or whatever you have people over for on your own time. But, you're nice to them at your job because you have to be. You get paid to do that. Jesus didn't just call Matthew because he needed to diversify the experience for his group of disciples, needed someone who knew their way around the books, or just someone who didn't smell like fish, or to get leverage with a key demographic of society. Jesus not only calls Matthew, he chooses to hang out with him, to go to his house, his party. He's *eating with sinners*.

And it gets noticed. The Pharisees are watching and seeing this as a big red flag. This rabbi, Jesus, is eating with sinners. What does that say about him? Now, we're not talking about “*eating with sinners*” as

hanging out with them as they do their bad thing and joining in their sin, or being party to a crime. We're talking about eating with sinners as an invitation to connect with their lives so that we influence them, so that they can meet our Father. That's what Matthew did, right? Jesus called Matthew. Jesus made him his. Then, Matthew invited all these "*tax collectors and sinners*" into his house. Why? To meet Jesus!

What lengths would you go to? We heard about Abraham meeting the three visitors and begging them to stay. Sarah put what amounted to 93 cups of flour to work in making a meal. Abraham found a good calf, slaughtered it, butchered it, and roasted it for these strange guests. The Greek word the New Testament uses for hospitality is φιλοξενία—Philos—love (like Phil-adelphia – love of brothers). And then ξενία—the Greek word meaning "stranger, alien, foreigner." Biblical hospitality is literally a "love of strangers."

It's inviting others into your family so that they can meet your Father. But our hearts make excuses, "Oh, my house isn't clean enough," or "We just don't have the time." Is this just pride and fear masking itself? "I don't want people to think less of me because something isn't perfect." Or the time thing—"I feel I've got better things to do," or, "I don't think you're worth the time." It's very easy to be the Pharisee and condemn biblical hospitality as unreasonable.

Common sense would say Jesus shouldn't have called Matthew because Matthew didn't deserve it. Jesus shouldn't have gone to Matthew's house because Jesus had better places he could be. He could've stayed in heaven. But Jesus did call Matthew to be his. Jesus came to his house to meet his friends who didn't deserve him. And Jesus has come here today to spend time with us, people who don't deserve him. Didn't he have better places to be or better people to be with? Yet he did more for us. "*God demonstrates what love is in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8). He took our sins upon himself, even the sins of pride and inhospitableness to our neighbor, and being blinded to who our neighbor really is, and he went to the cross for it. He became the stranger that no one wanted. He cried out, "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" He suffered being forsaken, suffered hell for you, so that you are not a stranger, but a son, a daughter. You are forgiven. You are freed from sin and blindness, as certainly as Jesus has risen from the dead and lives and rules eternally. He credited you with his **God-Lived life of hospitality** so that you have peace with God, and heaven, and a new life.

Jesus' call and love made Matthew something new—no longer "Matthew the tax collector," but Matthew, the "disciple of Jesus", "Matthew the evangelist," "Saint Matthew." Jesus' dying love makes you something new— forgiven. Jesus' call makes you something new—a baptized child of God. And Jesus invites you to a banquet with him—around his altar. In the Lord's Supper he changes our relationship with him and gives us a foretaste of heaven, not because we had status, but because he changed our status. He lived the God-lived life in our place to give us new life and that he might strengthen us to live **the God-lived life – a life of hospitality**.

And when he was accused of hanging out with sinners, Jesus silenced every opposition to that quickly. "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.*" It would be foolish for a doctor to stay away from his patients because they are sick. That's exactly why the doctor exists, to help the patients. That's why you are who you are, with the blessings God has given you. That's why he put you in your life with the people you come across. So, doctors, are you going to run away from your patients? No way! It's time for you to do some "*Eating with sinners.*"

After all, look at what Jesus said next: "*Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*" He wants us to not just look the part, not just go through the motions, but to truly love...even strangers, even sinners. That's who he came for. And thank God for that. He came to give you his God-lived life and motivate one in you. And through your God-lived life, through your life of hospitality, he will be calling even more sinners into his righteous family.

Hospitality means you want people to meet your family so that they can meet your Father. People aren't argued into the kingdom of heaven. The Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Let people not only hear it from your lips, but see it in your actions, in your hospitality. And as you **live your God-lived life, a Life of Hospitality**, you will be a blessing to others. Jesus made strangers into friends, into family. Jesus has done that for you. He's does that for you and for others through you that more might be at his table, not 30 or 40 minutes with plastic trays, but at Jesus' banquet table in heaven for all eternity. Amen.