

Follow Me
Matthew 9:9-13, July 26, 2015
Trinity Sunday VIII

Sermon Text, Matthew 9:9-13 (KJV):

“And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him. And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Beloved of the Lord.....Keeping in mind that Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we are the sheep of His pasture, we each have different paths to follow in this world, and God has chosen our path. To some Christians the Good Shepherd gives the path of sickness or disease. To others He gives poverty or loss of loved ones. To some He gives loneliness, and still others suffer great persecution or even a martyr's death. These paths also lead us to different places. Some are called to teach and preach God's Word, while others are called to be mothers of little lambs. Some are called to work in various fields of labor, while others are incapacitated to work, needing care. But whatever our calling may be in life, whatever our God-chosen path or cross to bear, Jesus still says "Follow Me" and we should happily follow that voice. This is the voice that has called us by the Gospel and enlightened us with gifts. And though we have different paths and different callings, our Good Shepherd seeks to bring us all to the same place, our heavenly home, therefore "Follow Me."

Yet if we follow Jesus let us understand, we cannot follow anyone else. If our own father or mother, son or daughter, wife or husband tries to lead us away from the pure Word of God, we cannot follow. If friends tempt us to sin, we cannot follow. If the world tempts us to follow her treasures and sinful pleasures, we cannot follow. Indeed if our own heart inside us seeks to lead us astray, we cannot follow. Jesus is the only way to heaven, the only door through which redeemed sinners can enter. To die in the faith of Jesus Christ is to joyfully enter in. But if we die trusting our works, there we cannot go. Therefore Jesus says "Follow Me" because "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture..... I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

I. Follow Me, by forsaking everything your heart treasures. Previous to today's lesson, Jesus had just healed a man that was sick of the palsy. Jesus first said to the man "Son be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee", and then because many doubted Jesus had the power to forgive sins, Jesus provided the great miracle so the man could walk.....that they "might know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins." After this our Lord went down to the seaside of Capernaum on the Sea of Galilee. On the way to this seaside Jesus passed by a customhouse where taxes were collected from the business men who traveled between Egypt and Damascus. This was essentially a toll booth, but bigger, a toll house.

Matthew was a tax-collector there, for Rome, a publican. He had an important job there which paid well. Yet when Jesus said "Follow Me", Matthew did. He left everything behind him without complaint because Matthew knew Jesus had the words of eternal life. Jesus was calling Matthew to join His ministry. That was God's path and choice for Matthew, and still today God's Spirit moves young men into that sacred path of the ministry. "The harvest truly *is* great, but the

labourers *are* few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.”

These words then of Christ....“Follow Me” are very powerful and very sacred. All Christians likewise have heard that call, not so much in the same words, but we have heard God call us by the Gospel and He has enlightened us with the gift of faith to believe. By the preaching of the Law God has opened our eyes to the truth that we cannot keep it. We see when we read the Bible that by our sins we merit God’s eternal condemnation. By the Law we become sick in sin, broken, and we cannot fix ourselves. But thanks be to God, that is not all God teaches. We have learned of Jesus. We have seen the cross by the preaching of the Gospel. This is much like our Epistle reading with the Ethiopian Eunuch. The Bible says “Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.” This means Philip preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the man, and somewhere during that preaching he was converted, for then the Ethiopian says “See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” This outward confession of words then shows the inward faith of his heart. He was called by the Gospel and he believed his sins were forgiven.

You too dear believer have heard this call of the Gospel, and inwardly you believe Jesus to be your Savior from sin. When Jesus says “Follow Me”, this is not just in the realm of justification, but also sanctification. He has a holy path chosen for you, the best path which will benefit your faith and soul. If He gives you the rocky path of tribulation, or if He gives you a cross to bear for a time, you should still trust Him with all your heart and not doubt but firmly believe. After all if Jesus’ love for you was so great that He laid down His life to save you on the cross, He is not a Savior that can make any mistakes, nor can His love wax dim. His love is always strong and perfect for you in every way. Therefore when Jesus says “Follow Me” you must follow Him by trusting Him. So the Bible says “The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.....*As for* God, his way *is* perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he *is* a buckler to all those that trust in him.Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring *it* to pass.” If then His way is perfect, His path for you, do not try to create your own path and way, but trust His path leads you home.

In like manner, if you are to follow Him alone, it will be necessary to deny this world, her treasures and pleasures. All the treasures of this world, all her wealth and honor will soon enough come to an end, but only those who trust in the Lord will receive heaven. Do not let your ungodly friends or co-workers or relatives tempt you away from Christ and God’s Word so that you deny the Holy Scriptures. James 4:4 says, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” This does not mean we should be unfriendly with unbelievers, for this is a lesson about Jesus who was not afraid to eat with publicans and sinners, but your heart cannot be a friend of the world in the sense that you yield to her sins. How close can you as a believer be to an unbeliever who says that what you believe is a lie? They deny that Jesus died for you and them. They are mocking your faith and all Christ suffered you. How can you be friends with that? At the same time our lesson teaches Jesus is a Friend of Sinners and so you should be. But you do not join with them in their evil, but you are to be friendly to them in spite of their evil.

Nevertheless be wary of ungodly friends and quickly separate from them if you feel them constantly trying to pull you away from Jesus and God’s Word. Do not think yourself strong either, for the devil has overthrown many Christians who thought they were too strong to be overthrown by the ungodly friends. If they attack your faith or deny the truth of God’s Word, why hang out with them and listen to them? You’re supposed to resist the devil not listen to him. And Jesus says “Follow Me.” because Jesus is your best Friend who will never steer you wrong. But ungodly friends can never lead you to Jesus, but they will only lead you astray if you let them. Beware then of who you spend your time with. Jesus suffered a lifetime to deliver you from sin and Satan’s power, but if you give in to the will of ungodly friends and follow their path, your faith can perish

in one moment. If then you keep your eyes on Christ, all will be well, but if your eyes turn away from Christ there is only darkness. Matthew 6:22-23 says, "The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great *is* that darkness!"

II. Follow Me, by showing mercy unto others, as I have shown you. In like manner the eyes of Christ were full of light, when He attended the feast which Matthew gave in honor of Jesus. Matthew had invited his friends, publicans and sinners, and Jesus was not ashamed to eat with them, for Jesus came to save them all. Yet the Pharisees had a problem with this. "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners." To which Jesus answered, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that be sick."

Jesus is pointing out, that these publicans and sinners also need His salvation, and He is happy to give it to them, but only those who are sick will desire Jesus' healing. In like manner no man on earth will desire Jesus or His forgiveness by the cross, except they first see how sick they are in sin. This is why in our Lutheran Liturgy we so often confess that we are "poor miserable sinners" who are "by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against" God "by thought, word, and deed." Therefore "if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell." Jesus said these very words so all men would know that even one sin committed with our eyes deserves the punishment of our whole body in hell. Yet Jesus did not come to give us hell, Jesus came to offer up His own body to God upon the cross as a ransom for our sin. He gave both body and soul to take away hell and give us heaven, even life everlasting. This He declares in John 5:24, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

Jesus then had the right to be upset with the Pharisees, because they thought themselves good and holy in comparison to the publicans and sinners. Sadly we Christians who go to church regularly commit the same sin, for we often think we are better than those adulterers, fornicators, drunkards, or Muslims. We forget sometimes, that we deserve the same damnation. We also forget (sometimes) that Jesus earnestly spilled His blood to save them just as much as He spilled His blood to save us. His Gospel is *Universal* Grace, not *Partial* Grace. His Gospel is that He died for *all*, not a "few" or only the "best". And so only those who are sick can desire to be healed. Only broken sinners can learn to pray "God be merciful to me, a sinner."

That brings to the final words of Christ, "But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Pharisees will not make it to heaven by their sacrifice. What have they sacrificed after all? Certainly they did not sacrifice their pride and confess that they were poor miserable sinners who deserved hell for their sins. Nor did they sacrifice their honor, for they loved to pray standing on the street corners so they could be seen of men. Nor did they bow down to God in the heart on their knees praying "God be merciful to me, a sinner." And even all their good works done to merit the praise of men, were never done to God's glory or praise.

Yet this is a lesson for us, not them. We are to read these words and understand, we too are saved *ONLY* by God's mercy, *ONLY* by the sacrifice of Christ, *ONLY* by the grace of God, and every by our works or sacrifice. Therefore when you know this and believe this and have faith, how do you look upon your fellow men who do not believe?.....with hatred and loathing, or mercy? *Mercy then, dear believer, and not sacrifice.* As God has surely saved you by the mercies of Christ, so you ought to earnestly show mercy toward *all* people, even your enemies. You should want the salvation of your president, just as you should want the salvation of all your children, or your brother or sister, mother or father. You should want the salvation of all Muslims just as much as you want the salvation of your own mother or father, son or daughter. Therefore beloved of the

Lord, *“go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”* Amen.

Pastor Tobin Pederson, 7685 Maple Hill Rd. Corcoran, MN 55340, 763-494-5164, solideogloria96@comcast.net srmn1121