

Second Sunday after Pentecost – 2026

Hosea 5:15-6:6

Romans 4:13-25

Matthew 9:9-13

There's a dark side to life. In this broken creation, there are dark spaces, dark ventures, dark lifestyles that become habitual for some who develop a taste for sin. The camaraderie in those spaces is real. One becomes comfortable with others who are traveling the same road. One's philosophy is reinforced by birds of a feather, birds who flock in the same dark domain. No one put a gun to Matthew's head and forced him to be a tax collector. Tax collectors were flagrantly and publicly profaning God's law. Ostracized, Matthew wasn't welcome in polite society. He was viewed as a traitor, in league with Rome and no self-respecting Jew would break bread with him. Matthew congregated with other disreputable people, those who had abandoned propriety. Some of us have been stuck in dark places. How did I get here? At a critical juncture, one's spirit longs for deliverance. Before Jesus called him, had Matthew heard Jesus preach? It's likely. One can feel prisoner to darkness and, however small, the yearning comes to get out. But the lifestyle, the patronage of friends, how does one escape?

It was pure mercy. It was love of the highest order. The Lord Christ called Matthew. "Follow me" (Matthew 9:9). The power to comply with the call is in the call itself. God's Word does what it says. Immediately prior to Matthew's call, Matthew himself tells us about a paralytic. "Your sins are forgiven," says the One whose blood would be poured out toward that very end (Matthew 9:2). Christ had authority and He had come to use it. Some were spiritually in the dark. They accused Jesus of blasphemy (Matthew 9:3). The Son of God came to bring forgiveness. His charter is forgiveness, His power is made perfect in forgiveness, His unwavering goal is forgiveness. Christ demonstrated His authority. He told the paralytic to rise. "Rise, pick up your bed, and go home" (Matthew 9:6). The paralyzed man rose. Matthew tells us that the paralytic rose. The body was restored. Faith awakened to the full. Christ's word does what it says and rising was the product. When Matthew was called, Matthew himself tells us that "he rose and followed him" (Matthew 9:9). Matthew deliberately chose the word for the resurrection to tell us that he got up from his tax booth and followed Christ. The one who had been paralyzed in darkness rose and followed Him who is the Light of the World.

It was time to party. Joy needs an outlet and a feast was prepared. Matthew's guest list isn't a who's who of the religious elite, it's a tribe of undesirables. Jesus breaks bread with a tribe of undesirables (dare I say a "basket of deplorables" – my kind of people). They hadn't proved themselves worthy. They hadn't done anything except to pay attention to this singular Rabbi, this font of grace. A dim but growing awareness of Jesus and His teaching captured them. And this distinctly powerful preacher is doing that which ought not to be done. He's sharing a meal with them. Such a gesture on Jesus' part carried an anticipated reprimand. Why, He's lowering Himself into their squalor by breaking bread with them – that was the thinking. Jesus is breaking mores. It's scandalous. Matthew and his ilk are to be kept down, to suffer the social consequences for their social crimes. That's the mindset that drives the Pharisees.

And so they heckle Jesus' disciples. These chaps are too cowardly to directly confront the Lord, so they heckle the Lord's disciples. What are they doing? They are trying to drive a wedge

between the Lord and His followers. They are impugning Jesus' character, smearing His name, trying to get the Lord's disciples to question their allegiance to this maverick. The English translation doesn't capture this, but the Greek verb emphasizes that they asked over and over and over and over and over: "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Matthew 9:11). They weren't curious. It was an accusation saturated in superiority.

Why did Jesus do it? Why'd He call Matthew? Why'd He eat with tax collectors and sinners? It's simple, really. Darkness is not where God would have us be. Have you ever felt compassion? Have you ever felt love? Jesus is the source, the origin of light. He knows what darkness does to the soul. He knows how empty and troubled and destructive darkness is... and He has compassion. Love prompts the Light to venture to us, in this dark realm. I am the Light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life (John 8:12). Love prompted the Incarnation. Love prompts Him to recline at a table with tax collectors. It's not the well who need a physician. A doctor doesn't heal healthy people. Original sin corrupts us, curves us in on ourselves, and prompts us to find dark places. Can you deliver yourself? Can you resurrect yourself? He saves us. Christ saves us from darkness. He saves us from selfishness and pride and lust and hatred and a life of hurting others and separation from the light.

Grace; Christ delivering you, when you couldn't take a single step toward Him; when you were dead in trespasses and sins, when Matthew was dead in trespasses and sins, Christ brought him out of darkness, by grace Matthew is saved. One can't get sicker than dead. The Physician came to resurrect the dead. Light reclines at Matthew's table and He eats with rabble. This altar and Matthew's table are of the same piece. Grace comes to you. Light comes to you. Forgiveness comes to you. We don't have to prove ourselves here. None of us could "prove" ourselves. Not to Him. Not to one another. We are restored to our Father by the blood of Christ. We are accepted by virtue of Christ's virtue, not our own. Christianity is not a religion for posturing, not a religion for acquiring worldly status, and certainly not a religion to keep others down. At Christ's table we all have the same status – CEO and chimney sweep, grizzled veteran of the cross and neophyte, both kneel and the crucified King gives us His status. We eat His body and drink His blood and we are holy.

I wonder, did Matthew forget where he came from? It happens, you know. Sometimes our past grows dim in our memory. Few of us regularly rehearse our worst days, our most embarrassing episodes, what it felt like to live in darkness. Did Matthew forget? St. Paul called himself the chief of sinners. He didn't forget. Paul wrote this: "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15). Matthew intentionally told you that he was a tax collector... and that Jesus called *him*. Do you know how marvelous it is to be delivered from a dead end? Do you know how marvelous it is to be washed of the film that comes with living in darkness? Hope and joy and freedom and a new life – do you know how marvelous that is? Grace; Jesus called Matthew because He is overjoyed to bring the power of grace into a sinner's life. He *is* that grace.

The Pharisees were told to do their homework because they weren't keen on grace. They studied the OT and didn't find grace. C'mon! I desire mercy, and not sacrifice. It's right there in Hosea (Hosea 6:6). We all have something to learn. Devotion to God and love for one's neighbor go

together. Outward performance of worship does not please God when the person lacks a heart of faith and mercy. We show others the light of Christ. We show others the light of His crucifixion – we need His sacrifice; we need the mercy He shows to those who have no hope of healing themselves. To love one's neighbor begins with gratitude for the Physician coming to us when we were sick. Christ's love prompts us to show others to our table. We teach them Christ's words, and we give them a place at our table. What happens at our table, our altar? The wonder of Christ's atoning sacrifice is brought to our lips. On the Holy Cross, the Lord of Glory endured the darkness of all sin, all death and He died to shatter it. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1:5). Heaven is light. Truth is light. Resurrection is light. God's grace is light. This altar is light. We, the saints of Christ the King, called by God, treasure the Light.