

Sermon - 21 September 2025

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Date: 21 September 2025

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] All things were made. For God's Son, for our salvation, He came down from heaven. He was in God and in the Holy Spirit, and Mary, and was named man.

For God's name, He was crucified and planted silent. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day, He rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended to heaven and seated at the right hand. He was alive. He will come again in glory to just, the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy, Catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.

[1:08] Amen. Please be seated. I desire mercy and not sacrifice, for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that in your mercy you send your Son into the world to do just that. In your mercy, in your love, you called us from death to life.

We pray now, as we are gathered as your people, listening to your word this morning, that you will speak to us again. Words of life, speak to us, Lord. Words that will comfort and challenge and reprove.

Words that we can stand upon firmly. Help us to have hearts and minds to receive it. And I pray, though, that you will help me as I preach your word to your people.

That I will receive and your Holy Spirit will speak through me. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We are at this morning, which is the feast day of St. Matthew, Apostle, Evangelist, and Martyr.

[2:30] We are observing that and we are going to be in the Gospel reading, Mark chapter 9, verses 9 to 13. I encourage you to open your Bibles and follow along in that.

I think it is on page 9. 168. 967, actually. Yes, 967. You can follow along there.

Now, I want to ask you, imagine for a moment that an important person, an important person, maybe it is the President of the United States or maybe the King of England or maybe Taylor Swift. I don't know. Take your pick. Whoever you think is important, right? You know? Maybe that person has invited you to a party and asked you to bring some people in your circles along with you.

Maybe it is your friends, your co-workers, your family, your neighbors, to bring them along to this party. Who would you bring? What are the criteria you would use to pick them to come with you to have an audience with such an important person?

[3:44] Well, on this red letter day in the church calendar, a day in which the church is invited to pause and ponder the lives of the saints in the New Testament, we remember the life of Matthew, also known as Levi.

Matthew was probably his Greek name. Levi is Hebrew name. He was numbered among the twelve apostles and he's one of the writers of the four gospels. Well, this story actually has a lot to do about his call to the Lord.

It's called the faith. It's called to be an apostle. Now, none of the twelve would have been first on the list amongst those we would naturally, if you had to pick the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ, you would probably not have picked any of the twelve to be the Lord's closest companions.

But of the twelve, Matthew will be considered the least worthy of all of them because of his profession as a tax collector. The Roman practice is to put out a bid to collect taxes for them in whatever region they are, they've conquered to gather resources, gather taxes.

And this is what they will do. They'll put out a bid and whoever wins the bid to be the tax collector for that region, it will be that person's responsibility to collect the amount that the Roman government,

the Roman governor has agreed upon that needs to be collected for that region.

[5 : 16] But the way the tax collector makes a profit then is to squeeze a little more out of people above and beyond what the Romans require.

That's how the tax collectors make their own money. And they have the power of the Roman army behind them to enforce what they demand of the people.

And often times the tax collectors, Romans know this, are people of the same area. People would know the people, would know what kind of professions the people do, the work they do, how they get their money, what resources they should have.

Because remember the Romans, after all, are foreigners and they don't know the lay of the land. So the tax collectors will be, in this context, of Israel, of Judea, of Galilee, there will be people from the region.

So the tax collectors were, you can understand why they were hated. You probably ate tax collectors in our day too. You know? But not as much and for different reasons than they would have hated the tax collectors of their day.

[6 : 27] These tax collectors were hated because they are, they've colluded with the Roman oppressors over their own people. There's collusion, there's extortion, there is oppression, and there is greed.

That's all required in being a tax collector. That's all required in the work that a tax collector must do. And this is why they're so hated by the people.

So, you imagine this man, Matthew, lives on the fringes of society because by the nature of his work, he colludes with his people's oppressors, people's oppressors, he's licensed by this same Roman authority to collect taxes in this specific area where he lives.

So, Jesus at this point is still ministering in the region of Galilee. So, Matthew is probably from that area of Galilee, near Capernaum and Cana and all this area where Jesus began his first ministry. And so, being from that region, remember then that there's another tax collector that was named in the Gospels. You know, the wee little man, Zacchaeus.

[7 : 34] This is different, this is Matthew, not Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus was one, where? Where was Zacchaeus from? Does anyone remember? Jericho, right? He's from the region of Jericho, closer to Jerusalem.

So, Matthew is in Galilee, that's his region of tax collecting. And this is the man that Jesus pays a visit to. This is the man that Jesus calls. But, just again, just, I want to paint the picture for you now. Matthew is a well-known figure in this region of Galilee, Capernaum, around that area of the Sea of Galilee. He's a well-known figure. Why?

Because it's his job to collect the taxes from all those people in that area. Well-known and well-hated. Well-detested by everyone. I imagine, I actually, I can surmise that even his fellow apostles would have known him and would have shared in the same detestation that everybody else around that area had for Matthew.

They would have hated him as well. Here is a greedy, crooked man who colludes with the pagan, religiously unclean Romans to exploit his own people.

[8 : 48] Who makes himself rich at the expense of his own people. Now, imagine if Jesus were the one who invited you to dinner.

Remember, imagine an important person invites you to dinner earlier. Imagine if Jesus is the one who invites you to dinner. He's more important, I hope you will agree, than the President of the United States. He's more important than Charles III, the King of England.

He's even more important than Taylor Swift. Now, if Jesus were the one who invited you to dinner and asked you to bring your friends, would you invite someone like Matthew to come along if you had a friend like Matthew?

If you were living in first century Galilee and where you were related to Matthew, you would have, by this time, disowned him. Make sure that everyone knows that even if he may be a relative, you have no part with, you have nothing to do with him.

You don't want to be tainted by association to him. The only people who, as we will see later on, were friends of Matthew are others, maybe people who works for him, because he will probably add on to, and there are people who are doing the work of collecting the taxes, and also other sinners, as we're told.

[10:05] It's not that he doesn't have friends, but it's not the respectable people that are his friends. And to be associated with someone like him is to make yourself an outcast and a pariah. Well, this is the kind of man Matthew was, but this is the very man that Jesus called.

Matthew, called by the Lord. So look with me in verse 9 of Matthew chapter 9. It says, as Jesus passed from there, we're not told the specific area where there is, but it's a continuation from the previous story in the Gospels, but as Jesus passed from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth.

And he said to him, follow me. And he arose, and he rose and followed him. Now, there's a lot here that must be unpacked about this call to follow.

Jesus called Matthew an outsider, a pariah to his people, a pariah to anyone in that region. He calls him to follow.

And look at the nature of the following, right? Look, first of all, I want you to see the nature of what he's doing. He's in the place of his exploitation. That's where Jesus met him.

[11:34] in the very place of his sin and in his employment and his exploitation, the very thing for which he's headed for.

That's where Jesus met him. And Jesus called him. And what did Matthew do? Well, first, Matthew rose and followed him.

But first, did Jesus beg him? Did Jesus say, please come? No, Jesus commanded. Jesus summoned as a king is one to do.

Jesus commanded him, follow me. This is not unlike the other apostles when Jesus called them. Remember Peter and Andrew?

Jesus met them in the midst of their profession as fishermen. and he called them to follow. Same with James and John, the sons of Zebedee. And what did they do? They followed.

[12:35] So Matthew, at least in this regard, he's not unlike the rest of the apostles. In obeying Jesus' call to follow, Matthew shows us that he's a model disciple and an example for us to follow.

In his obedience, to heed the call of his Lord. this man who was a pariah, who was despised and detested, rightfully so, by the people in his society, heard the words of his Lord.

He heard the beckoning, irresistible call of Jesus Christ. He didn't say to Jesus, well, okay, let me just finish setting my books in order and then I'll follow.

Let me make sure that I get back to the Roman authorities and get the rest of this, at least, batch of taxes to them and then I'll make sure to follow you. Here in this Matthew account, a man had come to Jesus and Jesus has called him to follow him and the man has said, well, first let me go do this and this.

Let me go bury my father in order before he followed. Here we see Matthew leaving everything behind to follow Jesus, obeying the call, showing the example of a model disciple, leaving everything behind and following his master.

[14:07] But also note again that Jesus didn't beg. Jesus calls and beckons. Jesus calls and beckons.

Jesus is the one who has power over everything. Matthew has actually shown us in his gospel how Jesus has power over nature to quell the seas.

Jesus has power over demons to deliver people from demonic bondage. He's also shown now how Jesus has power over the hearts of men to bring them from death to life with the power of his word. In each of those instances, it is a command, not begging. It is a summons from the Lord. In the same way, Jesus still summons sinners today unto salvation through his word.

Do you believe that? Do you believe it? That Jesus summons people to himself unto salvation from death to life. That is the greatest miracle. He brings dead people to life through the words of his gospel.

[15:17] If you believe it, do you live as if you believe it? Because the test is in how you live, how you proclaim that word of gospel that has been deposited to you.

Matthew heard this and he follows. So again, I just want us to see that Matthew is an outsider. But in reality, he's an insider.

He's come in to the fold. And who are the people who considered him preeminently as an outsider after all? Who are the people who actually, in Jesus' day, determines who's on the inside and who's on the outside?

The Pharisees. And so Matthew follows Jesus and what does he do? Verse 10, as Jesus reclined at the table. Matthew actually doesn't tell us whose table it is.

He's writing this gospel so I think he's being sub-deferential. But Luke and Mark tells us that it is Matthew's house. He's the one hosting the party. So Jesus, he follows Jesus and then he invites Jesus to his own.

[16 : 23] to hospitality, to fellowship with him, to dine with him. And Jesus reclined at table. Look at that word.

Reclined at table in the house, the house of a tax collector named Matthew. And behold, who were around him, many tax collectors, all his professional friends, and sinners, came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

Isn't this the model of someone who has grasped the gospel of Jesus Christ, the word of life? What do they do? They beckon others to come to hear that same word of life.

What does Matthew do? He calls all his friends. And what does Jesus do? Does Jesus say, well, actually Matthew, I'm making an exception with you because I see something really important in you.

But the rest of those tax collectors, I don't want to be associated with them. I don't want people to see me with them. They're sinners, you know. No. Jesus reclined at table with them.

[17 : 27] Do you understand the meaning? Actually, we invite people into our homes. And we invite them. But I don't know that we understood the full weight of, in the first century world, to have somebody come into your home and recline at table with them.

Maybe the best way I can think of it is that a more intimate way for us in our 21st century world is if you bring somebody along on a vacation. That's a different degree than just reclining at table with them, inviting them over.

You're stuck with that person over that period of vacation. That's kind of maybe something, it's a weighty investment.

You're committed to this person. You're committed to fellowshiping and investing and getting to know this person. When Jesus reclined at table with these groups of people, tax collectors and sinners to get to know them.

So, evidently, Matthew had friends. He also had wealth. So, he's not, so when we think of him as someone on the margins of society, I don't think we should all naturally just think of him as destitute.

[18 : 35] We should think of him as a man who was powerful, yet detested and hated. I wonder, in our 21st century were people we will consider in the vein of Matthew.

Someone that we would say we don't like. Or, maybe not us personally, but, you know, the society doesn't like, right? Someone who's been, who's a pariah by most people's standard.

Or by at least a lot of people's standard. That's the kind of man that Matthew is. And this is, this is, whoever that person is in your mind, that's the kind of person that Matthew comes into, Jesus comes into the home of such a person.

And dines with them and calls them to follow him. And what do they see as they followed, as these, as the gatekeepers, as it were, the Pharisees, seeing this?

Before we go to the gatekeepers, I just want you to note, by the way, that if Jesus would call a man like Matthew, that to you and me should be such good news.

[19 : 45] It is such good news, isn't it? This man who seems the most unlikely in his society is the one who God calls. Do not lose the fact that that is such good news for you and me.

That if God will call him, if God will call a man like Saul of Tarsus, a terrorist, a terrorist, no one is beyond the mercy of God.

You are not and neither is anyone else that you know in your circle of friends. Don't write anyone off. So this man comes and when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?

So we already know the makeup of the crowd in Matthew's party. Sinners, people who are, we know that the tax collectors are a low category of themselves, but what the rest of the sinners, there will have been a group of people who are, according to the Pharisees, who are the gatekeepers, are outside.

People who actually wouldn't even dock in the door of the synagogue or the temple, ritually unclean, ceremonially unclean, maybe because of their professions, prostitutes, criminals, whoever they may be.

[21:16] Who are such people in the 21st century world? Who are the people who say these people are unclean? You know, we still have categories for people who are unclean, even in the 21st century. It's different but there are people who, depending on where you fall, those people are unclean.

Those people are pariahs, licentious, drug addicts, drug dealers. Those people who, by their very lifestyle, you can see the degeneracy of their lifestyle by their very appearance.

racists. No one likes a racist in the 21st century world, rightly so. White supremacists, LGBTQI+, whatever they may be.

These are people who, in our world, depending on what circles they are, they may be considered ritually unclean. for these are the kind of people that are in Matthew's party. And the Pharisees sees it and they ask the rest of the disciples, why, why is Jesus with such people?

And Jesus heard them and he says, those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. just, those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick.

[22:56] Imagine just the import of that word for a second. How many of you have been in a hospital? I have to maybe visit somebody. I often have to go to the hospital to visit people, to pray with them if they're sick, or even if they're at the end of life.

Imagine going into a hospital. Do you feel at ease the same way you feel at ease when you're here at church perhaps or in your living room in your own house or visiting your friends?

There's a little bit of caution, right? You don't touch anything. You're careful. There's a reason why they have those hand sanitizers by the elevators, by the stairs, all over the hospitals.

In the back of your mind you're thinking, I hope I don't catch an infection. Well, Jesus says, those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick. The Pharisees think of themselves as well and they don't want to catch an infection and they see that the means by which they don't catch that infection is not to associate with sick people.

Jesus comes and says, I'm the physician. I've come especially for the sick people. Where do we fall, brothers and sisters, in this story?

[24:21] Are we with the Pharisees? what kind of parish are we? Are we meant to be a place where we want to be sanitized?

So that people who have infection cannot come in and see the physician? What kind of hospital would that be? I think it's Brian McGraw actually that likes to say, he said this to me a few times, so I know I'm stealing it from him.

the church is an hospital where the sick comes. Right? What kind of hospital will this be then if we don't let the sick enter?

What kind of hospital will this be if when we are sick we hide our infection so that people wouldn't kick us out? When this is the only place where they can meet the physician and hear his words of healing and life?

Jesus says, I've come. Those who are well have no need of history but those who are sick. Well, also, who are you? How do you see yourself? Are you well like the Pharisees? Because Jesus isn't actually saying, we do know this, right?

[25:39] Jesus isn't saying that the Pharisees are well, are righteous, don't need salvation. It's not that they're not without their own infection.

Their hearts are corrupted just like Matthew's is. The only difference between the Pharisees and Matthew and his friends is that Matthew recognizes that he needs a physician.

It is that story of a few Sundays ago when we saw the publican and the Pharisee in the temple.

What is the Pharisee saying? Praying and saying to God, I thank God that I am this and that.

And then what does the publican say? Beating his heart saying to God, have mercy on me, a sinner. But Jesus saw that picture and says, they're both sinners, but only one has received healing, the one who knows that he's a sinner and is asking for healing and mercy.

mercy. So, who is the most unlikely person you will think will be here today without a church?

[26:56] Who is the least likely person you will invite to church? Who do you consider the most disgraced person whose presence at church will embarrass you? Well, those are the kind of people that Jesus reclines the table with and eats with.

Those are the people whom Jesus draws near to. And so, we must condition our heart and our disposition to be like Christ, not like the Pharisee.

And I fear though, brothers and sisters, that oftentimes we tend to be like the Pharisees, the religious people. We must caution ourselves, resist the temptation to be self-righteous in our own mind, in our own self, to recognize that we ourselves are sinners in need of a physician. And we've been given that healing. We've been shown mercy, so we should extend that same mercy to others. So our attitude to the spiritual outsider, the outcasts spiritually, our attitude to those people will serve as a kind of thermometer for us to show us where we stand with God. That's what's going on with the Pharisees here who are questioning Jesus. The very fact that they're questioning Jesus' proximity to those people shows, reveals the state of their own heart. [28:23] So what is our attitude to those people on the outside? I use the word thermometer because to distance ourselves from sinners is to distance ourselves from Jesus whose priority is to the sinners, to the ones in need of mercy.

Jesus' priority, as he says, is to be a physician to those who are sick. And if we don't share in his priority, then what we've done is actually we distance ourselves from our Lord. And we're just Christians in name only. And so, heed the words of our Lord in verse 13. As he says it to the Pharisees, go and learn what it means.

Go and learn that I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Jesus is saying this to the religious insiders.

I desire mercy and not sacrifice. We confess it every Sunday that the character of God is property, when we pray, the prayer of humble access, his property, his character is always to have mercy.

[29:42] Why do we pray that at the prayer of humble access? Because we know that it's the only means that we can draw near to him. It is on the basis of his mercy. We're not righteous in and of ourselves.

We're not even worthy to pick up the scraps under his table. But his character, his property, is always to have mercy. And it's on that basis that we draw near.

It is on that basis that he has drawn near to us and brought us out of our merry! clay and washed us in his precious blood and adopted us as sons and daughters in his kingdom.

So will you honestly test your own heart this morning?

Your own motives, your intentions, your actions, knowing you are a sinner, then take joy and comfort in the character of God who came to show mercy to such sinners as you and I.

[30:53] Before we close, I just want to say a few things about the pitfall of a Pharisaic mindset. We must remember that even though now we are adopted sons of God, we were once enemies of God.

It is the mercy of God that brought us and transformed us. Remember that always. Remember that he loved us first and came to us in humility to save us so that we might be with him forever.

And then remember that it is a good and noble thing to cultivate that same love by which he's loved us. We must cultivate it.

And in order to cultivate that kind of love, courage is needed. Because we live in a world where we are called to love our enemies.

love our enemies. your enemies? Your enemies may be different from mine. Mine may be different from yours. But God's command is there for us.

[32:05] Love your enemies. Are you cultivating a heart that loves those that will be on the outskirts of your preferred community?

And I don't mean by that just love, you know, I don't mean just, you know, this kind of benevolence that we sometimes as Christians we need to feel. Love your enemies. Love those on the outskirts.

Or that means, you know, do mercy ministries to the person who is asking for a hand out. Be kind and generous to them. Yes, do that. But that person isn't really your enemy.

Who are your enemies? Who's that neighbor that you have a heated hatred or dislike for? Who's that co-worker that makes your life difficult?

Who's that boss? Or who's that family member who has just given himself to waywardness and brought sorrow to your heart?

[33:10] Jesus calls you to love them and to cultivate a heart of love. That requires courage. That also requires conviction and truth-telling.

You cannot love someone by lying to them. You love people by telling them the truth.

I have children and they would think the best way to love them as their father and their mother is to just give them everything they want and tell them how great they are.

But I know that to love them that way is actually to hate them. But how do I love them well? By telling them the truth, by leading them to the truth, the person of Jesus Christ.

That's what we're all called to do. That requires courage, brothers and sisters, in a world where to tell the truth will make the world call you haters of men and bigots and all sorts of names.

[34 : 19] Are you willing to tell the truth? Are you willing to love? Are you willing to love the way Christ loves us? Emptying himself?

Putting himself in danger so that he may love us? Are you willing to preserve your own skin? And withhold the truth, the saving medicine for someone who is dying.

Also remember, brothers and sisters, that Satan loves lies. And he wants to promote a culture of death, a culture of lies and disrespect. He wants to continue to promote a culture where we build up walls and we live within our own silos.

And as I say that, I think for most of you probably realize, yeah, that's the world we live in now. A world of lies where people live in their own silos.

Brothers and sisters, resist the temptation. Do not surrender to the cult of the enemy.

[35 : 33] go out of your comfort zones. Sit with the tax collectors and sinners.

Love them. Pray for them. Pray for them. Do you pray for your friends? Do you pray for your enemies? Is that the first and last thing you do?

God calls us to that. rest in the promises and word of God.

pride and cultural issues become paramount all around you. Don't give in to that.

Let the gospel take the front seat. Don't let the gospel take the back seat. Lead with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Lead with the love of Christ.

[36 : 40] Don't give in to the ease of self righteousness which builds a callous heart and an inability to love. Rather people will bite you.

They will kick out at you. Bear it the same way Christ bore it all for you.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus you called Matthew from collecting taxes to become your apostle and evangelist.

In the same way that you call this man and you transformed his life and you made him a vessel unto honor for the propagation of your gospel upon whom the foundation of your word was built along with the apostles.

We ask that you will grant us the same grace to forsake all covetous desires and inordinate love of riches inordinate love of the world's acceptance inordinate love of ease and comfort.

[37 : 57] Help us to forsake it all that we may follow after you as he did and proclaim to the world around us the good news of your salvation. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. The prayers of the people on page 6 of your bulletin.

Let us pray for the church and for the world saying, hear our prayer. Amen. Amen.