

## **Second Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 5 (Year A)**

**Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26** By. Fr. Carlos Rendon.

This morning's Gospel begins with a simple but astonishing sentence: "As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax stand; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him." (Matthew 9:9, )

The more we think about it, the more surprising it becomes. Matthew was a tax collector. He worked for the Roman authorities. Tax collectors were often known for taking more than they should and enriching themselves at the expense of their neighbors. They were among the most disliked people in the society.

If there had been a popularity contest in first-century Judea, Matthew would not have won it. Yet Jesus stopped in front of him. Not in front of a priest. Not in front of a scholar. Not in front of a saint. He stopped in front of Matthew. The people saw a sinner. Jesus saw a disciple. The people saw a tax collector. Jesus saw an evangelist. The people saw a man trapped in his past. Jesus saw a man with a future.

One of my favorite biblical truths is that God sees in us not only what we are, but what we can become. Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly called unlikely people. He called Moses, who doubted his ability to speak. He called Gideon, who was hiding in fear. He called David, the youngest and least expected son. And here Jesus calls Matthew, a man whom many people would have considered beyond redemption.

God's choices often surprise us because God sees deeper than we do. We see weaknesses. God sees possibility. We see failure. God sees potential. We see the present. God sees the future. That is why Jesus says in today's Gospel: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." (Matthew 9:12) Jesus did not come looking for perfect people. He came looking for people willing to let him change their lives.

And that should be very good news for us. Because here at the Church of the Redeemer, in the heart of Astoria, we are a community of many stories. Some of us were born in New York. Others came from Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Bangladesh, Greece, the Middle East, or many other places. Some are children. Some are teenagers. Some are raising families. Some have retired. Some have walked with Christ for many years, while others are still discovering what faith means.

Yet Christ looks at each one of us and says the same thing he said to Matthew:  
"Follow me."

Not because we are perfect. Not because we have everything figured out. Not because we never fail. But because Christ sees what his grace can accomplish in us.

There is a beautiful Jewish morning prayer prayed upon waking each day. It thanks God for restoring life and breath for another day. I have often wondered if every morning carries a message from God. Every morning that we wake up, God is saying: "I am not finished with you yet." The world often judges us by our mistakes. Sometimes we judge ourselves by our mistakes. But God does not. God sees beyond them.

William Barclay once observed that when Jesus called Matthew, he saw not simply what Matthew was, but what Matthew could become. That is exactly how grace works. And perhaps that leads us to a remarkable thought. We often speak about having faith in God. And rightly so.

Faith is trusting God's promises even when we cannot see the whole picture. But have you ever considered how much trust God places in us? Not faith in the human sense, because God knows all things. But divine confidence, Divine hope. Divine trust in what his grace can accomplish.

After all, Jesus entrusted the Gospel to fishermen. He entrusted the Church to imperfect apostles. He entrusted the Good News to Matthew. And he entrusts his mission to us. Perhaps no one has ever shown more confidence in human beings than Jesus Christ.

He looked at Peter and saw a rock. He looked at Mary Magdalene and saw the first witness of the Resurrection. He looked at Matthew and saw a Gospel writer. And today he looks at us and sees beloved children of God, capable of far more than we imagine through the power of his grace.

So if you feel inadequate, discouraged, or unworthy this morning, remember Matthew sitting at that tax stand, Jesus called him before he changed. Jesus called him before he became a saint. Jesus called him before he wrote a Gospel. And Jesus is calling you today.

Because the Lord who called Matthew still sees not only who you are, but who you can become. **Amen.**