

September 24, 2023

Matthew 9:9

You walk in. You're late. You don't know anyone there. The first thing you see is there's no room for you, at least not any easy room where you can fit in without sticking out. At first glance, everyone you see looks different from you. In some way they all look like they belong. But not you. You don't fit in, and it sure seems they don't care to fit you in. Some make it clear that you don't fit in; others just ignore you, pretending you don't exist. They don't have time for you; they don't have space for you. You look for a place to fit in, but you're not their kind of people.

How do you feel?

Until someone smiles, and makes room, and fits you in. Now, how do you feel?

In our lesson today, we don't walk in. More specifically, Matthew doesn't just walk in. Matthew is on the outs, on the outside. Outside of accepted or acceptable. Outside of fitting in with the accepted or acceptable. Outside. And there's nothing he can do about it. After what he's done, even if he stops, he will always be known as the tax collector, the traitor who went to work for the enemy, the cheater, the thief who took advantage of you and charged you more than you owed. That's Matthew, on the outs, outside of accepted, outside of acceptable. And there's nothing he can do about it.

Oh, he can pretend. He can act like he fits in, and for a time some people might almost believe his pretending until they find out the truth about him; for a time, he might almost believe his pretending that he fits in, until he can't fake it any longer. And then what? He can pretend that he doesn't care that he doesn't fit in or belong; he can pretend he doesn't care that he's not accepted or even acceptable. Pretending, he might convince some or most of the people around him; pretending, he might even almost convince himself he doesn't care about not fitting in. But someplace deep inside he knows and he cares that he's on the outside, unaccepted and unacceptable. So what does he do? He fits in with those on the outside. He fits in with those who don't fit in with the accepted and acceptable. He fits in with the unaccepted and unacceptable. But fitting in with the unaccepted and unacceptable isn't the same thing as fitting in. He knows it; so he hurts and he hopes for something better.

Sounds painful, doesn't it? And maybe, it sounds familiar? That's Matthew before our lesson. On the outs, outside of being accepted or acceptable.

Did you see what Jesus did? Matthew is at his tax booth, and Jesus goes to Matthew: "**Follow me.**" We don't know if they had met before; we don't know how much Matthew knew of Jesus before. But we do know who made the first step. Fast forward to Maundy Thursday, Jesus with his disciples, Jesus with Matthew - "**You did not chose me, but I chose you.**" Matthew couldn't fit in, but Jesus brought him in. Even after all Matthew had done, even with all his unacceptable connections, even though some would say that having Matthew around was bad for

Jesus' image, Jesus brought him in. Jesus brought him in with an invitation: "Follow me." Jesus brought him in by including him in his work. Jesus brought him in by including him in his social life.

That's right. Jesus didn't keep Matthew and the other outsiders, the other unacceptables, at arm's length. Jesus didn't see them or treat them as if they were good as part of a crowd with him, but not good enough to sit with or eat with. No, Jesus spent time, he invested time; he spent and invested what we might call social capital with outsiders and the unacceptable. Why? Not to get from them for himself, but to build relationships with them for them. I won't say that Jesus sacrificed his pride; he's not stuck on pride. But Jesus did sacrifice his image in the eyes of some, to gain hearts and souls so many didn't want. He went against the flow to show God's heart and love to people so many couldn't care less about.

Why? Not to be a social rebel. Not because the sinners were more fun or made better friends. Not to be a social crusader for diversity, equity, and inclusion. No, Jesus spent time with the outsiders to show them they were in God's heart. He spent time with the unaccepted and unacceptable, I won't say "to show them that they were accepted and acceptable to God just the way they were," but to show them that they were loved by God, and because God loved them, Jesus spent time with them so he could call them to repentance.

Did you notice what Matthew does with Jesus' call? He follows Jesus. He becomes part of what Jesus is doing, so much

so that Jesus is eating at his house. But Matthew isn't one of those outsiders who finds his way in and then forgets where he came from. Luke tells us more. Matthew hosts a banquet for Jesus and invites his fellow tax collectors and sinners. Matthew throws a feast for Jesus and invites his people - the outsiders, the unaccepted, the unacceptable - he invites them to meet Jesus.

That took some courage, didn't it? Some love, some selfless love. Would his friends, would the people he invite embarrass him before Jesus and those with Jesus? Would Jesus, or those with Jesus, embarrass him or his friends? Would he be left looking or feeling like an outsider again? Would the people he was inviting in to meet Jesus be left looking or feeling more like outsiders, more unaccepted, more unacceptable? I don't know if Matthew felt, it, but Matthew was taking a chance that something might go wrong, wasn't he? But that didn't stop him. Matthew saw an opportunity to show the love that Jesus had shown him; Matthew saw the opportunity to share that love of Jesus by inviting his people in to meet Jesus. And what happened? They came, and they got to meet Jesus.

We like hearing stories like that, don't we? Jesus calls us to be stories like that. Instead of treating us as outsiders, instead of treating us as unaccepted and unacceptable sinners - and he could, couldn't he?

Writing this sermon had me thinking of so many times I have steered clear to avoid the outsider, the so many times I have failed to reach out to the outsider, the so many times I've worried about my pride, or my image, or my success, or my convenience,

the so many times I've thought about "me, myself, and I" instead of reaching out like Jesus or like Matthew. I would imagine we all have times that haunt us, don't we? Or should haunt us.

But Jesus didn't just judge us unacceptable and steer clear to avoid us. Instead, he stepped out of his comfort zone; he stepped into our world; he stepped up to the cross with all our unacceptable sin and guilt. He took our place as outsider, our place as unacceptable, our place as sinner under God's judgment; you heard him on the cross: "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!**" Jesus took our place as outsider and sinner, but he didn't live as outside and sinner before God; he trusted himself into God's hands - "**Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.**" And what did the Father do? He didn't leave Jesus on the outside; he took Jesus home as his Son; he raised Jesus up as Lord over sin and death; he set Jesus up in heaven. Not to steer clear of us, but to work his church to reach out to you. To invite you: "**Follow me.**" To love you, to bless you, to save you. And, like Matthew, to include you and me.

You're already in. You see someone else walk in or just walk by. You don't know them, but you can see they don't fit in. Perhaps it's just that they look different from everyone else. Perhaps they look uncertain, unsure. Perhaps what you see is hurt and heartbreak. Perhaps they fit in too much with the world and now they struggle to fit in here. You know what Jesus did for you. What do we do for them? What do you do for them? Amen.

September 23 & 24, 2023

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we have never had more tools to connect and communicate, and we are surrounded by people who feel lonely and alone.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we see a Jesus living the God-Lived life willing to reach out and connect with those who would otherwise be left out. It's good to be included with Jesus, isn't it? That's why as we Live the God-Lived Life, we seek to live a Life of Hospitality.

OPENING HYMN

"Son of God, Eternal Savior"

Hymn 729

Son of God, eternal Savior, source of life and truth and grace,
Word made flesh, whose birth among us, hallows all our human race,
you our head, who, throned in glory, for your own will ever plead:
fill us with your love and pity, heal our wrongs and help our need.

Bind us all as one together in your Church's sacred fold,
weak and healthy, poor and wealthy, sad and joyful, young and old.
Is there want or pain or sorrow? Make us all the burden share.
Are there spirits crushed and broken? Teach us, Lord, to soothe their care.

As you, Lord, have lived for others, so may we for others live.
Freely have your gifts been granted; freely may your servants give.
Yours the gold and yours the silver, yours the wealth of land and sea;
we but stewards of your bounty held in solemn trust will be.

Son of God, eternal Savior, source of life and truth and grace,
Word made flesh, whose birth among us hallows all our human race,
by your praying, by your willing that your people should be one,
grant, O grant our hope's fruition: here on earth your will be done.

I rejoiced with those who said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the Lord.”

How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty!
Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.

The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees,
that I may follow it to the end.

Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light on my path.

Faith comes from hearing the message,
and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

Silence for meditation and reflection

Almighty God, grant to your Church the Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes from above. Let nothing hinder your Word from being freely proclaimed to the joy and edifying of Christ’s holy people, so that we may serve you in steadfast faith and confess your name as long as we live; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Genesis 18:1–15

The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant."

"Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread."

Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him.

"There, in the tent," he said.

Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already very old, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my lord is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh."

But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL

Matthew 9:9-13

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.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

"Blest Be the Tie That Binds"

Hymn 730

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;
the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.

Before our Father's throne we pour our ardent prayers;
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comforts and our cares.

We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear,
and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.

When here our pathways part, we suffer bitter pain;
yet, one in Christ and one in heart, we hope to meet again.

From sorrow, toil, and pain, and sin we shall be free
and perfect love and friendship reign through all eternity.

SERMON

BIBLE STUDY

ACTS 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

INTRODUCTION

In general, Christians are viewed negatively by mainstream pop culture while Jesus is viewed positively. Why? What would it take to change that perception?

INTO THE TEXT

1. The early Christians devoted themselves to four things. Explain how each prompted the unity they needed to reflect Jesus to their community:
 - Apostle's teachings
 - Fellowship
 - Breaking of bread
 - Prayer
2. Describe what your experience would have been if you were to visit this congregation.

APPLYING IT

1. Hospitality is literally, “love of strangers,” in Greek. To loves strangers means that we as a church need to be outward focused. It is easy for churches to lose that perspective and focus on inward concerns. What are ways that our church could become too inward focused? (i.e., How do we ensure outward focus?)

2. The early church was “all for one and one for all!” They were generous with all of the gifts God had blessed them with. They were willing to share everything and others noticed. Come up with at least three ways our church can reflect that early Christian spirit of hospitality.

“If after Kirk ye bide a wee,
There’s some would like to speak to ye,
If after Kirk ye rise and flee
We all seem cauld and still to ye.
The one that’s in the seat with ye
Is stranger here than ye, maybe.
All here have got their fears and cares,
Add ye your soul unto our prayers,
Be ye our angel unawares.” – Scottish Blessing

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

M: Lord Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, you humbled yourself to be born of a virgin. You became one of us. Your hospitality knew and knows no bounds. You invited fishermen, a tax collector, people from all walks of life to be your disciples. You welcomed little children and took them up in your arms. You spoke to the woman at the well and offered her living water—forgiveness and life. Give us a rich measure of your Holy Spirit so that we take that same view of all people we meet. Lord in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

M: Holy Spirit, you have turned our hearts from the darkness of sin and eternal death to the light of life and an eternity in heaven through Jesus Christ alone. You have given us eyes to see our Savior Jesus. Give us eyes to see each person we meet as one for whom our Savior died, and one God loves dearly. Give us the words to speak in love. Grow us in wisdom through our study of your word and grant us peace. Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

M: Father, you created us and continue to provide and protect us. Give us the courage and trust to take you at your word. Your word tells us, “You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God” (2 Cor. 9). Give us the courage to be hospitable to others whether in the family of believers or those not yet in the family of believers. Protect and provide for us and let our generosity overflow to strangers. Lord, in your mercy:

C: Hear our prayer.

Special prayers and intercessions may follow.

M: Hear us, Lord, as we bring you our private petitions.

Silent prayer.

M: Accept our prayers and grant all we need, not because we are worthy, but for the sake of Jesus Christ who lived a perfect life in our place and died for our sins and was raised again. **Amen.**

PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING

The almighty and merciful Lord—the Father, the T Son, and the Holy Spirit—bless us and keep us.

Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

“Oh, How Good It Is”

Hymn 731

Oh, how good it is when the fam'ly of God
dwells together in spirit, in faith and unity.
Where the bonds of peace, of acceptance and love
are the fruits of his presence here among us.

Refrain

So with one voice we'll sing to the Lord,
and with one heart we'll live out his word,
till the whole earth sees the Redeemer has come,
for he dwells in the presence of his people.

Oh, how good it is on this journey we share
to rejoice with the happy and weep with those who mourn.
For the weak find strength, the afflicted find grace
when we offer the blessing of belonging. *Refrain*

Oh, how good it is to embrace his command
to prefer one another, forgive as he forgives.
When we live as one we all share in the love
of the Son with the Father and the Spirit. *Refrain*

OFFERING

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EVERYONE OUTREACH

BUILDING A CONGREGATIONAL OUTREACH CULTURE

Register today for the Everyone Outreach workshop!

Our St. John family is participating in an exciting new program called Everyone Outreach. The program will help us build a culture of outreach so that every ministry and every member is encouraged and equipped to reach the lost in our community.

Everyone Outreach kicks off with a 2-day workshop on Saturday and Sunday, October 14-15.

- Our Saturday session begins at 8:30 am, until about 12:30.
- Our Sunday session begins at about 10:30, until mid-afternoon (lunch break TBD)

The interactive workshop will help us discover some of our hidden thought habits that may keep us from being active in outreach. Then, we will learn ways to change those thought habits so that, as a result, our outreach actions change as well. Each participant will leave the workshop with sustainable ways to personally help build our congregation's outreach culture.

Disclaimer: Joining us for this workshop does not mean that you are committing to join a St. John cold-call team or a St. John guest follow-up team. You are simply committing to want to be better at sharing Jesus with the people you know, and encouraging us to be better at sharing Jesus with the people God puts in our lives.

To register for the workshop, you can register at church, or use the QR code (left) to sign up at signup.com (you don't need a signup.com account).



For more information, visit EveryOneOutreach.com (QR code bottom right) or contact any of our Outreach Team - Nic Holter, Dan Freck, Denise Fullerton, Dave Knight, Steve Lemerand, or Pastor.

We encourage every member of our congregation to attend the workshop and participate. In fact, the more of us who attend, the more likely our culture shift in sharing Jesus will be successful!



YOU MAKE A DIFFERENCE HEALING & HELPING OTHERS IN NEED!

Did you know?

YOU can heal and help others in need simply by supporting **Christian Family Solutions (Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service)** through your workplace?

Many workplace giving programs, such as United Way, have begun to organize their 2023-2024 campaigns.

As a 501(c)(3) social service charitable agency, Christian Family Solutions (under our legal name of Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service - WLCFS) is one of the donor choice program options to which employees can designate funds. Through this option, **you can support organizations and causes that closely align to your own Christian values.**

Each year, Christian Family Solutions heals and helps thousands of people through Christian counseling and services. In 2020, this ministry logged over 50,000 hours of Christian counseling – in 2023, we are projected to reach 90,000 hours! That is 90,000 opportunities for our counselors to share the hope of the Gospel with a hurting soul.

Consider supporting our ministry through your workplace giving.

If you have questions about your participation in such a program, check your employer's guidelines. **You can also contact 888.685.9522, or e-mail info@wlcfs.org for more information.**

Wisconsin Lutheran Child & Family Service, Inc.

W175 N11120 Stonewood Drive
Germantown, WI 53022-6511

Tax ID: 39-1047224



What might a God-Lived Life of hospitality do?

- **Invite** a neighbor, co-worker, or family to worship or Bible Study
 - **Invite** someone who needs Jesus
 - **Invite** someone from St. John you haven't seen in a while
 - **Invite** them to come with you to worship or Bible Study
 - **Invite** them to come with you to our _____
(Our picnic is past, but our Women's Christmas Party, and ____ are still coming!
What should we add to our hospitality ministry calendar to fill in that blank?)

- **Welcome** someone new each Sunday
 - **Welcome** and sit with someone different each week
 - **Welcome** - keep your eyes open to greet and meet someone you don't yet know
 - **Welcome** - keep your eyes open to greet that someone you haven't seen in a while
 - **Welcome** - Become a St. John Greeter or Join our Name Tag Team

- **Connect** with someone new over coffee, tea, lunch, brunch ...
(You don't need to force-feed Jesus on them, but be ready to give an answer for the hope you have.)
 - **Connect** with someone in your life who needs Jesus
 - **Connect** with a guest you meet at church
 - **Re-Connect** with someone you haven't seen in a while

- **Gather** for EveryOne Outreach - October 14-15
 - Join us Saturday and Sunday
 - Invite, encourage, nudge, and gather _____ (others) to join us
 - Let Nic know you can help set up, serve, clean up ...