

6.28.2020 Trinity 3 (Matthew 9:9-13)

In the year 1878, less than 25 years after this church was built, Dr. James Robinson and his wife Dr. Ella Ford Robinson moved to Jacksonville and opened a drug store that was connected to his medical practice. Back in those days, in this pioneer town, doctors like the Robinsons treated every type of illness and injury. These doctors were general practitioners by necessity. They did it all, from delivering a newborn baby, to caring for a person as they drew their last breath. They even made house calls, sometimes traveling more than 100 miles on bad roads in all kinds of weather to set broken bones, pull teeth, and provide care for all sorts of wounds and diseases.

So much has changed since those days. An appointment with your family doctor today is often scheduled only to receive a referral to one of the more than 120 different types of specialists. We live in a day of pediatric doctors and geriatric doctors, doctors who treat brains and others who fix hearts. We have specialists for every type of person and every part of our body. This is our experience with physicians today, but what about the Great Physician? What about Jesus? Was He a specialist, or would the many, varied, and miraculous ways He healed the sick lead you to think otherwise?

Our Lord reached out to the leper and said, *“Be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed”* (Matthew 8:3), to a Centurion whose servant was paralyzed and in terrible agony, Jesus said, *“I will go and heal him”* (Matthew 8:7), and when He came to Peter’s house and saw Peter’s mother-in-law sick in bed with a fever, *“He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she got up and began to serve them”* (Matthew 8:15). Jesus made the blind see, the lame walk, and the deaf hear. He cleansed lepers and raised the dead. Our Lord is not a specialist, because His focus is not on one type of person, one part of our body, or one aspect of human suffering. The healing He provides to the sick is without any limits, and it is absolute.

The many different historical accounts of Jesus healing all types of disease and illness reveal that our Lord is no specialist, and when we contemplate our New Testament reading today, we learn that the Great Physician provides compassionate care and healing for both the body and the soul. In the passage we read this morning, we see this picture of Matthew sitting at his tax

collector's table. Matthew is a publican, a tax collector, a man despised and hated by his own people because tax collectors were not only working for the enemy by collecting taxing for the Romans, many of them were thieves. Tax collectors made their living at the expense of their own people by overcharging them and then pocketing the surplus. For these reasons the Gospel writers often use the terms *tax collectors* and *sinners* as though they mean the same thing.

When you picture Matthew sitting at his tax collector's table, remember, this is the life he lived. If you or I were there that day, we would've seen a man despised and rejected by others, a sinner who was not being true to his faith, an Israelite viewed by his own chosen people as an enemy of God. If you or I were there that day that's the Matthew we would've seen, but it's not who Jesus saw, because as you know "*man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart*" (1 Samuel 16:7). Jesus, the Great Physician, is able to see what we cannot. When He looked at Matthew, He didn't see His enemy, or a man to despise and reject. He saw a man who was sick and suffering, a man in need of a Physician.

So, the Great Physician went to work. He began treating His patient with living words that pierced his heart. Jesus spoke directly to Matthew and said, "*Follow Me...*" (Matthew 9:9). *Follow Me...* At this point, it's important to remember that Matthew is the inspired human author of the Scripture we're reading today. This passage is Matthew sharing his own story, and we need to recognize that instead of describing himself as a saint from the beginning, he makes it perfectly clear that he was a sinner saved by the grace of God. I believe what Matthew wants us to understand at the beginning of his story is the truth that most powerful revelation of God's unconditional love for us is found in the knowledge "*that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8).

In the same way that a physician doesn't wait for a patient to show signs of recovery before beginning the treatment, the Great Physician doesn't wait for us to begin to recover on our own. We can't. Jesus came to Matthew, and to you, and to me, when we were sick and suffering and unable to even ask for help apart from the grace of God. We were completely unable to reach out to Him, the Great Physician had to reach out to us, and thanks be to God that

Jesus meets us all where we are. Thanks be to God that the Great Physician was, and is, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. He is the One True God who meets us when we're sitting at our own tax collector's table, and begins His healing work by saying, "*Come, Follow Me*" (Matthew 4:19).

It is the physician who guides the patient on the road to recovery, and our Lord's call to repentance, His call to turn away from this world and to follow Him is a prescription for healing. Yet, like any prescription, healing begins only when we use our free-will to follow the doctor's orders and take the remedy. Matthew communicates that truth in his own conversion story by telling us that when Jesus, the Great Physician, said to him, "*Follow Me,*" Matthew "*arose, and followed Him*" (Matthew 9:9).

St. Matthew's freely-given, faithful response to the grace found in Jesus' call to get up from that table, to turn away from sin and to follow Him, is an example for us. In his example we learn that the Son of God died to save us, not in our sins, but from our sins. The Great Physician "*heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds*" (Psalm 147:3) by prescribing a remedy that calls us out of a place of sin and rejection, and into a place of forgiveness and reconciliation. St. Matthew found healing when he "*arose, and followed Him,*" and as an Apostle of our Lord he invites us to do the same, to follow Jesus moment by moment, day by day, on this great exodus that leads to the kingdom of God.

Today, there are more than 120 different types of physicians who specialize in every different part of the human body, but inspired words written by St. Paul tell us that there is only "*one Mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus*" (1 Timothy 2:5). If ever you find yourself sick or hurting or separated in any way from intimate communion with God our Father, remember, there is only *one Mediator between God and mankind*. There are no referrals, and no second opinions, for there is only one Great Physician and He is the only Remedy to cure the sin-sick soul.