

## Jesus Calls Us: “Follow Me!”

✠ **He eats with sinners.** (vv.9-11)

✠ **He doctors the sick.** (vv.12,13)

In the name of Jesus, the Friend of sinners and Doctor of our souls, dearly redeemed disciples, especially you our Confirmand, Matthew:

What would make a young boy with so many things to do and a love for sports give up so much time to memorize Bible passages and the Six Chief Parts of Luther’s *Small Catechism*? You were not satisfied with the two-year requirement for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. No, you voluntarily began in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, continued through these two years, then asked if maybe you could come a fourth year. To say, “I’m proud of you!” would be an understatement. But mine is not human pride because I know this was not easy or even possible because of you or me. I know the real reason for your devotion to God’s Word is the same thing that drew your namesake, Matthew the tax collector, away from worldly pursuits to follow Jesus. What’s true for you is true for all of us on this your Confirmation Sunday. **Jesus Calls Us: “Follow Me!”** But the reason why we hear and heed His gracious invitation is not because we are so good. We come because we know Jesus, kind and good. We feel right at home with Jesus because...

✠ **He eats with sinners.** (vv.9-11)

Since our Lord Jesus finished preaching His *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5-7), He has been very busy. These are all stories that we studied in Catechism and which your parents and Sunday School teachers taught you from infancy. The dear Holy Spirit inspired Matthew’s record of miracles from the love and compassion of God’s own Son.

The man with leprosy made a simple request, “*Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.*” Jesus’ answer was as sweet as his healing: “*I am willing. Be clean!*” (8:1-4)

Faith-born love prompted the Roman centurion’s compassion for his paralyzed slave “*in terrible suffering.*” But his humility objected to Jesus even coming under his roof. Jesus kindly rewarded such faith with His healing from a distance. The gap of sin was covered by God’s grace. (8:5-13)

Many miracles in Capernaum our Lord performed, including the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law. Isaiah’s prophecy was fulfilled from the song of the Suffering Servant: “*He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.*” (Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 8:14-17) But to those whose fickle emotions might keep them from following Him, Jesus gave serious warnings about lack of creature comforts and family loyalty. (8:18-22) Matthew, you will take the Christian oath today not to turn from Jesus even in the face of death.

Did Matthew hear how Jesus calmed the storm with His Word? Did news of two demon-possessed Gadarenes reach his tax collector’s booth? (8:23-34) The famous Rabbi from Nazareth could read the minds of His blasphemous enemies, and yet the religious leaders denied His deity. But the crowds, “*were filled with awe and praised God who had given such authority to men,*” not only to heal the body, but even more, the guilty soul. You too have heard our dear Lord Jesus say to you, “*Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.*” (9:1-8 KJV) If even a fraction of this Good News in word and deed got through to Matthew, his heart was prepared for God’s gracious call out of the darkness of sin and unbelief into glorious light. It’s easy to see why Matthew would throw an evangelism party for Jesus.

You know how many times our full class of sinners with their sinful pastor has had to admit we did not prepare with all our heart or treasure God’s Word as we ought. Simple answers and concepts that ought to be so clear after God’s perfect explanation in the Bible, still escape us because we are blind and

deaf in this old sinful nature that drags us down and depresses us. For this alone we know we deserve only God's eternal wrath and punishment. But I've seen that look in your eyes when I get to tell you again how fully and completely our dear Lord Jesus has forgiven all your sins. As we bask in the sunshine of God's full and free forgiveness, I feel as if I'm looking through the eyes of Jesus and His dear Holy Spirit who called me to serve in His Name as your pastor and teacher. It's as if I'm looking into the tax collector's booth at Matthew when Jesus stood there calling. I can see the joy of Jesus reflecting there when Matthew hears the Master say, "**Follow me!**" I can see how he leaves a lucrative life with lots of money to walk away in the footsteps of the Lord's Christ on His way to the cross. And I know why Matthew, your namesake, threw a big party in order for his friends to meet the Savior of his soul. Jesus **eats with sinners**. So we find comfort in the fact that we are welcome here with Him. But not everyone feels that way. As you have been warned and have already experienced, sometimes the most religious people don't have a clue what it means about Jesus that...

### ✝ **He doctors the sick. (vv.12,13)**

***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 [to repentance]."*** (KJV added)

What use would we have for Jesus to doctor our souls if we thought we were already healthy and strong without Him? If we could believe other religious leaders who say, "You're okay. I'm okay. Everybody's okay – or could be if they were just like you and me..." then what need would we have for a man like Jesus who spends so much time at parties with the worst of people? As long as we could just stay away from bad people and live a life that is outwardly good, upright and moral, we could be proud of ourselves and walk around a cut above the rest. Self-esteem would be our main goal in life.

Then we would have no need for Jesus. And He would have no need for us. Sacrifices of animals like the ancient Jews commanded by God, or heaps of money and long pilgrimages today to sacrifice time and treasure – none of these are what the Lord wants from people. In today's Old Testament Lesson from Hosea 6:6, we heard the passage Jesus quoted to His fellow Jews, the self-righteous Pharisees: "**But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'**"

You know, dear brother in Christ, that "**mercy**" means far more than pity that looks down on others. God's "**mercy**" went to work to lift us up and set us free from the sins and sicknesses of our body and soul. "**Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.**" (Isaiah 53:4 KJV) "**He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.**" (Matthew 8:17 NIV) The Doctor of our souls can see how all the sickness, sorrow and suffering came into God's perfect creation. We've traveled back in time on the wings of the Holy Spirit to see how our first parents rebelled against God's simple, loving command and by that first sin brought God's curse upon us all. But we've also seen how God right there in the garden paradise of Eden promised that Jesus, the Seed of the woman, would crush the serpent's head. Our sin-sick souls are healed by the blood of Jesus that washes away our sins. We have paradise restored!

As important as all your learning is, Matthew, as necessary as it is for you to review the rest of your life the Bible passages and Catechism parts that we learned – it's not just for you, as you well know. In fact, the best way for you to stay faithful to Jesus as He has so faithfully delivered you for this new life of pure joy in God's presence, is for you to let Jesus keep using you like that first Matthew to call other sinners to the Savior's side. To share with them what you have learned of law and gospel, sin and grace, will make these treasure grow like flowers blossoming in your mind and heart, like treasures of wisdom and knowledge beyond all earth's wealth of gold and silver. Jesus who called you has also confirmed you by strengthening your faith. And the best is yet to be – always when we walk with Him who says daily, "**Follow me!**" May you always be the Lord's own Matthew. Amen.

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