

"A Compassionate Heart"

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

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the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

⁹As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, **"Follow me."** And he got up and followed him.

¹⁰And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹²But when he heard this, he said, **"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."**

¹⁸While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." ¹⁹And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. ²⁰Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, ²¹for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." ²²Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. ²³When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, ²⁴he said, **"Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping."** And they laughed at him. ²⁵But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. ²⁶And the report of this spread throughout that district.

Prayer.

There are many joys to being a pastor. I'm surrounded with great people who are passionate about their faith. I'm privileged to be invited into the great celebrations of life's passages- birth, baptism, confirmation, graduations, wedding, anniversaries, and deaths. Indeed, I draw strength and courage from the examples many of you set. My faith is deepened through your commitment and resolve. There are many joys to being a pastor.

I don't take lightly other people's pain or suffering. But, quietly, privately, I do delight with other people's self imposed guilt. This is what I mean- when I was a medic on the ambulance, taking a drunk from a bar fight to the hospital, cussing and swearing to beat-the-band, to have another member of the crew introduce

me as "by the way, I'd like you to meet reverend Goddard." Or to have the head of the VFW who is riding with me in a car, recognize the fact that the parade is delayed because of all his men had to "just get one for the road." Or to have the patrol supervisor make an ethnic slur, only to have me introduce myself around the circle later, then to watch him sit uncomfortably and sweat.

Guilt has it's place.

While I might smirk or take delight in another's ignorant remarks, quietly, privately, I'm self-aware enough to recognize that I'm unable to sit on my high horse for too long. I know myself well enough to recognize that I'm a sinner, no better, and no worse, than anyone else. I put my pants on just like everyone else, one leg at a time.

There is no moral high ground here. There is no pontifical or episcopal protection from the wages of sin. Ordination doesn't grant me a "Get out of jail free" card. Neither is there safety simply because you might be a Christian, or you might be attempting to lead a righteous life. I applaud you for your effort; but I know better. Not only are we united by our common baptism, but we are also united by our common sin.

Jesus said, "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." (Matthew 9:13)

I know that everyone of you is a sinner, because I am one, too.

Sinners come to church, often led by the hand by well meaning parents. Many do not come willingly. Some may have put up a fight just an hour ago. "I don't want to go to church. Why do I have to go to church? No one else from school is at church. I hate church!" But a rule is a rule, so here you are, arms folded, brows furrowed, determined not to get anything out of it. "I'm here, but I don't have to like it."

Sinners come to church, motivated by guilt or family pressure. Out with friends last night until a late hour – or early hour – the incongruity between the party last night and the service this morning is striking. The posture is impossible to miss: slouched rolled shoulders, down cast eyes, queasy or light headedness. Thoughts are mostly "I just want this to be over with."

Sinners come to church, motivated by good intentions and true desire, only to experience troubling thoughts. Sin that's deep, dark, and carnal. In the midst of worship, a thought turns to something that you are not supposed to think about, and I certainly am forbidden to say. Hormone driven thoughts lead to shame and fear that God might be eavesdropping. "Oh, my goodness! What's wrong with my dirty mind?!"

Sinners come to church, filled with new ideas, calling into question what is taught and what they used to believe. Youth challenging authority- Shocking! Perhaps they don't believe in God after all. Perhaps this is a sham, a lie, a farce

and no one should be here. Organized religion is nothing more than organized crime. It's all a bunch of hooey! Despite their new found freedom to question, they remain slaves to sin, and like everyone else, love to roll in the muck.

Sinners come to church, upright and proper, heads of the household, respected members of the community, who put on an unblemished exterior. But deep inside, all are wondering. Wondering about those marriage vows. Break them? Who would know? Wondering about children. Is it right to bring innocent children into this world? Who better to raise a bunch of sinners than sinners? Wondering about the IRS return, the little white lie on the timecard, or the office supplies that make their way home.

Sinners come to church, who have put on some weight, middle aged, balding or graying, starting to become a little ragged around the edges. Youthful indiscretions securely vaulted and locked away in the past. Aches and pains, behind closed doors, belching (farting) and belly-aching about every new twinge or pull, all-the-while failing to follow the doctor's advice. A little too much wine with dinner, a credit card overextended, growing anxieties, grown up kids who won't move out. Good old, middle of the road, over insured, middle aged sinners.

All kinds of sinners walk through the door of the church. Some walking slowly, stooped with age, others running, giggling, and paying no attention. Some have lost the sin of ambition, and in it's place are yielding to the sins of despair, disappointment, resentment, or finality. Some sinners come to church wearing shoes made in sweat shops by children, wearing clothing that is made by virtual slaves in third world countries. Some sinners care but do nothing. Other sinners could care less.

I'm the first to admit that the biggest sinner of us all is usually the preacher, the one who leads, the one who does all the talking. It is far easier to do as I say, not as I do. Some may lift my office to a higher plane, but I know that reverend is nothing more than a title, and it doesn't cut too deep.

We all come and close the door behind us.

There is no one without sin.

No one bears any more guilt than anyone else. We're all in this together.

And Jesus walks by and says, "Follow me, sinner. Follow me."

Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners! "And suddenly a leader of the synagogue came to Jesus."

Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners! "And suddenly a woman reached out and touched his garment."

Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners! And suddenly, oh, so suddenly, you and me, we find our voice. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see."

"I'd like to come and dine at your table today," the Savior says, point directly at us.

So gather we must, around this table of God's grace. There is plenty of room for every sinner. Make sure we make room for the Savior.

Would you just take a look at the company Jesus keeps?

Outrageous ...

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.