

Saint Matthew/XIV Trinity 2025

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

St. Matthew 9.9

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It was a busy day in the Capernaum Tax Office. Matthew was trying to keep up with the crowd filing their tax returns. He was never very happy with his work as a tax collector. None of his friends wanted to have much to do with him. They thought he was a traitor for collecting taxes from his own people to support a pagan government.

While the scene described is plausible...we actually know very little about Matthew's background. He's something of a real mystery man! He was a Galilean Jew who was born, lived and worked in Capernaum and he had a better than average education.

We don't know why Matthew started working for the Capernaum Tax Office. Ultimately, it doesn't really matter. Like the tax collector in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican, Matthew was weighed down and burdened by a job that put him at odds with his own religion.

In the New Testament, the word "publican" means "public servant". Matthew's work in the Capernaum Tax Office would have included more than collecting people's taxes. He would also have been the general contractor responsible for issuing business licenses and building permits...things still done by State, County and City offices today.

Weighed down and burdened by his job, Matthew may have felt he was in the spiritual crisis of a lifetime in a hostile desert with no way out. He was in for a surprise. Jesus came to lift Matthew's burden...he asked him to leave his tax collector's job and follow him. Matthew was only too happy to leave everything.

The Gospel tells us the next thing Matthew did was invite Jesus to his house for lunch. Matthew's circle of friends was probably limited to other tax collectors. They were invited to lunch along with other "outcasts"...the dregs of society the religious teachers called "sinners". They criticized Jesus for having lunch with "such people".

Jesus heard the religious teachers and told them people who are well don't need to see a doctor...but only those who are sick. He then told

them to go figure out what the Prophet Hosea really meant when he wrote about 800 years earlier...

...“I want your constant love, not your animal sacrifices. I would rather have my people know me than have them burn offerings to me.”

Jesus then told the religious teacher he had not come to call respectable people, but outcasts. The religious teachers should have known they weren't respectable in God's eyes by avoiding people they don't like. They provided lip service to God...but did they really know him? They created heavy, burdensome practices for the people, with strict, legalistic rules without offering any true relief or help.

Jesus embraced Matthew and the other tax collectors he was having lunch with. He actively sought “outcasts” so he could do what he did for Matthew...lift the burdens that were weighing them down. Jesus called Matthew away from the Capernaum Tax Office. His burdensome tax job was replaced by the work of an *apostolos* (one who was sent out) to be an *evangelos* (messenger of good news).

Jesus saw great potential in Matthew to do God's work as an Apostle and Evangelist, just as he saw in the other Apostles and Evangelists... just as he sees in us. Matthew's legacy is the Gospel...the Good News...that bears his name. We share in his Apostleship in the sense we are all commissioned and sent out to be evangelists...spreading the Good News in a fractured world weighed down and burdened by sin.

Jesus sends this Invitation to us at every Mass...

...“Come to me all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads and I will give you rest.”

He doesn't promise removal of all challenges but a spiritual rest and renewal for the soul that comes from relying on God.

Matthew's Good News...is a message for everyone who listens and responds 'yes' to the invitation to follow Jesus. It is Good News...for those who feel isolated and lost. It is Good News for us. It is Good News even for tax collectors.

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