

July 2, 2017

Matthew 10

Matthew Sermon Series: "Connecting with Christ"

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church

Our current sermon series is titled "Matthew." He is the tax collector, the complete rogue, whom Jesus called to be his disciple.

In our planning, we talked about calling this sermon series, "The Least Likely Disciple," because Matthew was that. We considered a sports-themed title, "The Strangest Draft Pick Of All Time," because Matthew was definitely that. We really liked this title, "The Very Last Guy You'd Ever Expect Jesus to Want to Hang Out With," but it didn't fit on the bulletin cover. In the end, we just went with "Matthew."

So, over the past two weeks, you've heard how Jesus approached this greedy, cheating tax collector and said, "Follow me;" and how Matthew did exactly that. You heard how the holy, pious Pharisees grumbled that Jesus was too friendly with sinners. You heard how Jesus enjoys hanging out at the table with people like Matthew, and people like us.

These stories from Matthew's life are incredible! It's heartwarming and encouraging to know how Jesus chose to reach out and connect with Matthew, because we're all Matthews, aren't we? Our stories might not be as dramatic as his. But isn't the story of Jesus and his love in your life really special to you? Weren't we all lost and condemned sinners, just like Matthew, before Jesus' grace and mercy reached into our lives? There's a Matthew inside of all of us, and his story is our story.

Today, the story takes an amazing twist.

Matthew's been a disciple for a very short time. He's quit his job, stopped chasing money, renounced his past, and just started following Jesus around. Matthew's probably thinking, "OK, this awesome guy Jesus really seems to see something in me, despite my past. And Jesus seems to have the power of God in him somehow. I can't believe my life has changed so much, so quickly!"

And while Matthew is just starting to get adjusted to his new connection with Christ, Jesus initiates a new phase in his discipleship. Jesus says to Matthew and the eleven other disciples, "You've seen me do miracles? Now you guys go out and do the same. I'm giving you my power. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons," the Lord commands. "Go from village to village, and tell the people, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

What do you think Matthew's reaction was? "You want me to do what? You expect me to do the miracles I've see you do? Jesus, you're allowing me, with my messed-up past, to represent you out there?"

This is all pretty unbelievable. But this is how our Lord operates. Jesus connects with sinners, and then he uses sinners to connect with other sinners. Jesus connects with a super-sinner, Matthew, and then in no time at all he uses Matthew to connect with other sinners. Jesus connects with sinners like us, and then he uses sinners like us to connect with other sinners. This is how Jesus functions.

The Bible doesn't tell us exactly how Matthew did, when Jesus sent him out to connect with other sinners. But I can imagine that Matthew's incredible story of Jesus connecting with him made a powerful impact on some of the people he met, and talked to. If Jesus could help someone like

Matthew get right with God, he could help pretty much anybody, right?

So Jesus first connects with Matthew, and then he uses Matthew to connect with other sinners.

And that's how it works with you and me, too. Think about your own faith story. Who was it that first connected you with Jesus? Was it your parents? A Sunday School teacher? A friend, or a pastor? Whoever it was, that person was a sinner, just like Matthew.

Whoever preaches to you from this pulpit is a sinner. Whether it's me, or Pastor Lew, or the new vicar, Caleb; or Pastor Wagner. Even Pastor Lineberger. We're all sinners. We're all afflicted with sin in our human nature, all of us. What does the Good Book say? "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We all have a backstory. Matthew was a super-sinner, but aren't we all, in the sight of God?

And we're all here today because Jesus Christ has connected with us. **Only** because Jesus Christ has connected with us. Praise God, Jesus died for our sins! Thank God, we've been called to saving faith and we're forgiven! Hallelujah, God accepts us and loves us because of Christ Jesus! What a fantastic story!

But don't miss what comes next for us. Like he did with Matthew, Jesus connects with us and then he uses us – sinners that we are – to connect with other sinners.

There's someone out there who needs to hear your story. There's a lost sinner out there who's waiting to hear the story of how Jesus came into your life, the connection Jesus has made with you, the impact that Christ's love has made on

your heart, the importance of Christ's Word in your life. It's not your story, really, is it? It's the story of Jesus. But your version of that story is like no one else's. And there's a sinner out there who needs to hear the Good News of Jesus and his love for you.

There's a whole world filled with sinners out there. And Jesus has love for them all. Our nation – great as it is, with all of our freedoms and liberties – desperately needs the Good News of Jesus. Because it's a nation of sinners. The town of Wake Forest, and every local community, is filled with people who are struggling, just like us, with their own sins; caught up, just like us, in sinful cycles; wrestling, just like us, with their own Matthew stories, people just like us who are lost and condemned in the eyes of God because they are – just like me and you – sinners.

But, remember, Jesus connects with sinners like us. He reaches out to us, he saves us, he forgives us; and then he uses sinners like us to connect with other sinners. That's the story of Matthew. That's our story, too!

So let's get busy. Let's start living out this part of our story, and sharing the Good News of God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ. And I can't wait to see what comes next in Matthew's story, and ours! Amen.