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**Pentecost 03, June 18, 2023**

**“Sinners Anonymous”**

**Read: Matthew 9: 9 – 13 and/or memorize Mt. 9: 13**

**Our Gospel lesson presents us with a problem. As Jesus is walking around a town, He comes to a tax collector’s table. They were despised and considered unclean sinners by their own people. Nobody in their right mind would have anything to do with them. Yet, Jesus says to the tax collector, “Follow me.” Even more astounding, the man does.**

**Even worse, Matthew throws a party and invites his friends, other tax collectors to meet Jesus. Jesus welcomed them. Matthew tells us that when the Pharisees saw this, they asked the disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” When Jesus heard this, He replied, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.” Then, says, “But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”**

**Perhaps, you’ve wondered also, “Why did Jesus eat with sinners?” Maybe you’ve had the same question. They wondered if Jesus was unaware of what He was doing. Shouldn’t He eat with the church folks? His sense of values is all wrong. Would Jesus eat with Vladimir Putin?**

**The answer is that God deals with people as they are – sinners. It is only sinful people that pretend that they are startled by their own sinfulness. God takes it for granted. God set the key event of history, sending Jesus to die on a cross to pay for our sins; overcoming death by His resurrection.**

**Jesus doesn’t argue with the Pharisees. He doesn’t bother to justify Himself. You kind of feel like He hardly misses the next bite of food, but in a kind of off the shoulder remark says, “It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick.”**

**Paul reminds us in Romans 3: 23, “All have sinned and have fallen short of the Glory of God.” Again, we hear Paul in 2 Corinthians 5: 19, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them ...”**

**Jesus, eating with Matthew and his friends, was not just an experiment in public relations. It was not an integration gimmick or something artificial. For Jesus, this was the way He came to live life and He lived it to the fullest.**

**How hard it is for us to believe that: “For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” Most of the time when we hear those words, we think of a whole bunch of other people who**

Jesus came for. After all, we're sitting here in church, we must be the ok ones. Sometimes, we even look down on them.

A person who gossips cannot see why other people steal. The thief cannot see why others murder. The church goer who curses on the job cannot see why others keep away from public worship although they have a similar excuse of weakness. Parents, who do want their children to know of Jesus are surprised when they don't follow Him. .

All us sinners have one thing in common, we cannot understand the sin of others. And there is this ability to strongly condemn those whose problems take a different direction from than ours. We can even be snobbish about our sins at times.

Then we have to confront something about which Jesus and the Word seem to be of one mind: there is only one union of sinners. While others might have a choice between two or more, we sinners don't have an alternative. We are all members of the Union of Sinners.

And unfortunately, we seem to be lumped all together. There are the haters and harlots; the gossips walk arm in arm alongside murders; proud, stuffy church people are happy in the company of idolaters; jealous people are linked with sorcerers. People who are envious are right in with the drunkards and carousers. It's just a disgusting mess, isn't it. There is no one forming a separate union for "my kind of sinner."

God says all sin separates us from Him and each other. I suppose frail human judgement will always classify some manifestations of sin as worse than others. If of us, especially those with a guilt complex can place ourselves in the least damaging category. There is always someone who is worse.

But anytime that happens remember those words of Jesus, "the healthy don't need a doctor." Only a person with a broken leg or arm needs a splint. Only a child with a cut finger needs a band aide. If you don't think you need me, well that's ok. I only came for sinners.

If you are a sinner, you'd better come sit at Matt's table. There is no other place for you. You cannot meet God half-way. He came all the way for you. He came, in the person of Jesus so that God could meet you on your level. And that level is the level of Matthew's table, where you are placed alongside everyone else.

A woman who had recently been converted came to her pastor and said, "Please tell me how I can be a good witness to my husband. I want to win him for Jesus." The pastor replied, "Yes, you want to be a good witness. I will give you several guidelines. First, whatever you do, don't go home to your husband and give him the impression that you have now become morally infallible. If you do he will do one of two things."

"If he knows anything about his own heart, and most of us do, he will first write off any possibility of becoming a Christian." Inevitably, people who are not Christians think there is some standard they have to live up to. This reveals that the non-believer has the fundamentally

wrong concept of salvation. It's not what you do, it's what Jesus has done. We're not always clear about that because we see ourselves as good.

**“When you goof up, your husband will think otherwise. And, believe me you will goof up. You may do perfectly for weeks; then the kids let you down, the pressures are great and you suddenly explode. You're going to feel miserable, because with that explosion your understanding of Jesus is going to be blown out of the house with you.”**

**“As soon as your husband sees you goof he will not only believe he could never be a Christian, but he will also write off the validity of your Christianity as well.” He continued, “Go home, and tell your husband that you have discovered all those things he said about you in that recent quarrel he had with you were correct. That may place him in such a state of shock for several minutes. While he is out, you can compose the rest of your sermon. Then, when he regains his consciousness, say to him that he didn't tell you half the truth. Confess that you are far worse than he has ever said.**

**Tell him that by becoming a Christian you have discovered that you are a wretched spirit but have found forgiveness with Jesus. Then you could tell him that if he were to acknowledge his wretchedness and ask Jesus to forgive him, he, too, could find forgiveness. Then, when you try to work for God's glory and you goof up as we know we all shall do, you will confirm the gospel. You can say, ‘Lord, there it is again, but that is why you came.’”**

**We are all sinners. It is only the Lord Jesus who makes the difference. We cannot. That's what we as a church acknowledge. We want to remember as Paul says in Romans 2, “For God has no favorites: those who sinned outside the pale of the Law of Moses will perish outside its pale, and all those who sinned under the Law will be judged by the Law.”**

**Yet how often we misunderstand that. We want to talk about how we have won such and such important person to the faith. Rarely, if ever, do we see a headline telling that some nobody is now the Church Council President. We need to get comfortable again with the idea that we are all sinners.**

**Just imagine if you had to write a letter to a church council that had thieves and pickpockets on it. Yet that's exactly what Paul did for the church at Ephesus. And what does he say to them? Not that they are all now different but rather he reminds them that thievery is not preferred way of life for a Christian. Imagine finding a congregation like that and announcing that from a pulpit in our day.**

**But perhaps those aren't our sins. After all our sins are never those types of sins. Maybe we need to rewrite some of Paul's words when we talk about our sins, sins like overeating, binging on TV, or being a shopaholic. Or how about dissing people on social media anonymously.**

**We often forget how desperately we need Jesus to atone for our sin. Anytime you do not feel this self-need for Jesus and His merit, you are in essence objecting to being a sinner. Just in case**

**you forgot our Gospel reading, let me say it again “For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” He came for the sick; He came for you and me.**

**The sick and their sicknesses may be nauseating, but He came for them. Do not act as if He missed His mission when He dealt with your sin. Remember what happened to Matthew. Matthew was practicing his sickness in his office one day when Jesus came and changed his life: “Follow me.” That’s exactly what Matthew did. Maybe that’s what we mean by “Sharing Christ, Changing Lives!” Even as our lives are changed by Jesus, we want to call others to new life through Jesus.**

**How impertinent of God to call Matthew, the professional sinner to be an apostle. Don’t you think it would have been better for Jesus to just forgive Matthew and let him go off rather than have him write a Gospel? Perhaps, just perhaps, He has something in mind like that, for us. After all, who but Jesus and His followers call sinners to repentance and give them second chances?**