

## SAINT MATTHEW/XVI TRINITY 2015

### SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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#### ST. MATTHEW 9.9



Jesus sure likes to hang out with the wrong kind of people. Take Matthew, for example. He is somebody everyone loves to hate...a tax collector!

We know very little about Matthew. Father Altberg calls him something of a mystery man. His given name was probably Levi. Like Simon Peter..."The Rock"...and James and John..."The Sons of Thunder"...Matthew is the name Jesus gave him...and means "God's gift".

Matthew had his tax office in Capernaum. He spoke in his native Aramaic and was also fluent in Greek for his business to be successful. His job as a tax collector set him at odds against his own people. They called him a traitor and a sinner...someone to be shunned.

Matthew's legacy is the Gospel that bears his name. In his book *Lifting the Burden: Reading Matthew's Gospel in the Church Today* Father Brendan Byrne describes how Matthew wants us to see humanity as Jesus sees it...afflicted and weighed down with burdens...and Jesus has come to lift those burdens.

Matthew is a teaching Gospel. For Matthew, what Jesus says is as important as what he does and the miracles he performs. Burdens get lifted and get replaced by happiness and there is no clearer teaching on True Happiness than the Sermon on the Mount:

*Happy are those...*

*...who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them!*

*...who mourn; God will comfort them!*

*...who are humble; they will receive what God has promised!*

*...whose greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy them fully!*

*...who are merciful to others; God will be merciful to them!*

*...who are pure in heart; they will see God!*

*...who work for peace; God will call them his children!*

*...who are persecuted because they do what God requires; the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them!*

Almost everything we know about Matthew is contained in today's Gospel. The 4<sup>th</sup> Century church historian, Eusebius, writes Matthew

spent most of his time preaching the Good News and teaching near Jerusalem. Matthew believed he had a special mission to reach out to fellow Jews and show them Jesus was the promised Messiah.

After Matthew left his tax business to follow Jesus he invited him and many other tax collectors and marginalized people to his house for lunch. That got the Pharisees attention and they were vocal in criticizing Jesus for the company he kept.

Jesus tells the Pharisees people who are not sick don't need to see a doctor...only sick people do. He then tells them to go read what Hosea wrote 800 years earlier, "I want your constant love more than your sacrifices". He then told the Pharisees he didn't come to call respectable people, but outcasts.

When it comes to respectability in God's eyes we need to listen to what Jesus is really saying. Pharisees thought they were special and the rules didn't apply to them. We sometimes find people in the Church who think the rules don't apply to them either. The truth is none of us gets a pass in the sin department. But there is a way out.

Matthew also believed Jesus' mission was to unite all of humanity into the Fellowship of Believers called the Church. We can thank Matthew for recording the arrival of the Magi who brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh...to the child who was their King...and who is our King..."Jesus is the Light who brings us out of darkness and darkness cannot extinguish the Light that is Jesus".

Jesus' put-down of the Pharisees would serve no purpose unless there is a lesson to be learned. Outward piety cannot cover up an angry or hateful heart. When we think we are so special we can exempt ourselves from loving others, we embrace darkness and a terrible burden. That's not where Jesus wants us to be.

What is respectable in God's eyes? Let's listen and respond to what Jesus says, "It is kindness that I want...I have not come to call respectable people, but outcasts."

