

Friend of Sinners

Pastor Luke Bernthal

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Text: Matthew 9:9-13 (NKJV)

⁹ As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me." So he arose and followed Him. ¹⁰ Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. ¹¹ And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹² When Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³ "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

I think we all know the importance and blessing of having a friend. Have you been particularly blessed during your life to have someone that you would consider your “best friend”? Someone you can always count on to “be there.” Someone whose friendship was unconditional. Someone who always made your day better. Someone you just really liked being around. If you’ve had that type of a friend during your lifetime you are truly blessed.

Growing up in Michigan, I had a best friend named Tom. He lived just a couple of blocks down from me in my neighborhood, and from the first day we sat next to each other on the bus on the way to kindergarten all the way until I went out of state for high school, we were without question best friends. We were as close as brothers. We were always around each other. We liked the same things, always had lots of fun playing sports and games together, and were always there for each other whether times were good or bad. We even cried together when the time came for me to leave for my freshmen year at our church’s high school in Wisconsin. Yep, just two teenage boys exchanging gifts, hugging, and crying on the front lawn of my family’s house. I don’t think we cared what the people driving by must have thought. We were best friends and we knew we would miss each other.

Our text for this morning reminds us that no matter who we are, no matter where we live, or what we are going through we all have a best friend who is there for us in good times and in bad. Whether we are rich or poor, healthy or sick. We all have a “best friend” in the one who was once described as being a “Friend of...Sinners” (Matthew 11:19).

Did you know that title was given to Jesus by His enemies, and it was meant as an insult? Jesus, however, wore that title like a badge of honor and reminded those same Pharisees in our text that this was the very reason He came to this earth. “And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’”¹² When Jesus heard that, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.’¹³ But go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy and not sacrifice.” For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” (Matthew 9:11-13)

The fact that Jesus is the “Friend of Sinners” should also be a great comfort for us, because we are “sinners.” And as Jesus’ words remind us in our text we are “sick” and in “need of a physician” (v. 12). We are all in desperate need of a “best friend” who is always there for us; Who can help us and heal us from our terminal sickness of sin.

The sad fact is that we often act less like we’re the “sick sinners” in need of a friend (which we are), and more like a self-righteous Pharisee who likes to think “I wouldn’t be caught dead hanging around ‘this person,’ or ‘that person.’”

Isn’t that crazy? You and I both know full well that we’re sinners—sinners with a capital “S.” All of us! We know without a doubt that we’re all “sick;” we’re all broken—every one of us. And yet, we like to act like we’re not, or we try to hide the fact that we are, or somehow pretend that we’re not as “sick,” or as broken, or as sinful as others are.

The fact is, we’re all in the same boat: We’re all sinners; we are all “sick” with the same eternal “terminal illness” because of our sins. None of us are perfect. None of us have perfect lives, no matter how it may look on the outside. No matter how fun, happy, and beautiful our Facebook or Instagram makes our lives look, the fact is we are all “broken” people in desperate need of the “Friend of Sinners.”

We are all people who could probably use a fellow “sinner” as a friend, and often forget what a blessing it is to be a friend to a fellow “sinner.” The best way to be a friend to a fellow “sinner” is to introduce them to the “Friend of Sinners,” Jesus!

He is the One who will always be there. The One whose friendship and love is truly unconditional! The One who took the “sickness” of our sins, made them His own, and gave us the complete and perfect “cure” by His own death on the cross. He will turn no one away. He doesn’t consider anyone “beneath” Him. He wants to be the “Friend of EVERY Sinner!”

Are we the same kind of “friend” to “sinners” like Jesus is? Or are we more like the Pharisees? The Pharisees turned their nose up at the “scum” of society—“Ugh! ‘Tax collectors and ‘sinners’” (which likely referred to prostitutes). They also turned their nose up at Jesus for associating with these “public” sinners and felt no need for Jesus’ forgiveness or healing because they didn’t think they were actually “sick”—or at least not as “sick” or as “sinful” as these people were.

Do we feel there are people who are “beneath us”? People who, because they are “worse sinners” than we think we are, we would never associate with them and would not only turn our nose up at them, but anyone who would associate with them. Who are the “tax collectors and ‘sinners’” we would turn our nose up at today? “Addict. Inmate. Adulterer. Homosexual. Alcoholic. Ugh!”

What if Jesus shared the attitude we often have toward “sinners”? What if He had that kind of attitude toward us? What if, when He looked at us, all He saw was our sin? “Cheater. Liar. Wasteful. Unfaithful. Untrustworthy. Lazy. Lustful. Thief. Ugh!”

Thank God He didn’t—and doesn’t—have that attitude toward us. He came to wash us clean from those sins by His blood on the cross so that when God looks at us He doesn’t see “sinner.” Because of Jesus’ righteousness He sees “friend!” He is even a friend to ME! As the Apostle Paul says, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance:

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners-- of whom I am the worst" (1 Timothy 1:15 NIV).

We can all say that because we are all sinners—and not just “little sinners”—“Sinners” with a capital “S”! Thanks be to God, we all have a real Savior—a Savior with a capital “S.” He has given us the cure for our “sickness” through His cross and He is happy to call us His “friends.” Now, who can we, fellow “sinners,” be a “friend of sinners” to, like Jesus is? Amen.

Pastor Luke Bernthal
Messiah Lutheran Church
Hales Corners, WI