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Pentecost 3

Matthew 9:9-13

CHRIST IS OUR LIFE-SAVING PHYSICIAN

There is always something reassuring about seeing a doctor. How many times as young parents don't we take our child in to be checked out just for the peace of mind –just for someone to say, "She's alright. She doesn't have strep throat." Or after the surgery, aren't we perturbed if the surgeon doesn't see us right away and give us an assessment? The portion of God's Word we are considering today tells us of another physician who gives us more than an opinion or even assurance. This physician saves lives for eternity. Christ is our life-saving physician. Let us consider that He calls on His patients, and secondly, He treats us with mercy.

Most of us don't remember this. Some of us might. There was a time when doctors came to you. They made their rounds from house to house rather than from examination room to examination room. They carried along with them a small black bag with their medicines and equipment.

Here in Matthew chapter 9 we see our life-saving physician, Jesus, making a house call on the apostle Matthew. Christ does not wait in His heavenly clinic for His patients to make appointments with Him. He calls on His patients. He determines their need. He acts at the right time.

Matthew was a tax collector. I wonder if tax people anytime in history have ever been liked. It was even worse for someone like Matthew. He was a Jew collecting taxes from fellow Jews for the occupying Roman government. You already know how you feel about the IRS. Imagine if somehow Al Qaeda took control of America with all their cruelties and inhumane behavior. How would you feel about your next door neighbor, your long-time

friend, your fellow American citizen, if he volunteered to exact a tax for Al Qaeda from your street? How would you feel if you know he was taxing you more than what Al Qaeda was demanding, and he was skimming off the top to line his own pockets? Somehow he'd seem worse than a traitor, wouldn't he? That's the kind of reputation men like Matthew had in Jesus' day.

The Bible doesn't tell us for sure, but it is very likely with all the public disapproval Matthew had many deep, infectious wounds of conscience oozing with guilt. As a result of an aching conscience he may even have become bitter, cynical, defensive, insulting, crude or abusive –and always hurting. But Christ, the life-saving Physician called on this patient. We are told, "*Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.*"

Is there anything for which someone could feel betrayed by you? Is there anything about you that if someone found out you'd say, "Now let me explain..." The terrifying thing is, God doesn't let us explain. The Bible says before Him every mouth is silenced. For us who want to defend ourselves God's judgment falls on us swifter than the wind. He is holy and has every right.

But now let's look at God in the person of Jesus Christ. We no longer see a stern, damning judge. We see our life-saving physician. We are infected and dying with sin. Who wants to walk into a room filled with disease and risk being contaminated? But Christ comes to us. He seeks us out. He finds us. Nothing stops Him. He is not repulsed. He is fervent. Not only did He go to Matthew and call Matthew as His own, He even went into Matthew's home and ate with him and all his friends and associates –no doubt a motley bunch.

Christ said, "*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.*" He's not interested in us for how good we are or how well we've done. He did not come for good people, but for bad. He's not interested in His career, but in saving our lives from the sin that's eating us up like terminal cancer. He comes to us even today regularly, often, like a familiar friend, through His Word and His

Sacraments. He does not shun or avoid us. Consider how He sought you out and found you and called you by name and made you His own at your Baptism. Consider how in the Lord's Supper He even permits Himself to be received inside of you, body and blood, to save your life for eternity.

But what's the medicine Christ uses to treat our malady? Our life-saving Physician treats us with mercy.

We read once again, "*While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' On hearing this, Jesus said, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: [And then quoting an Old Testament Bible passage Jesus said,] I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.*"

The Pharisees were experts at doing everything right and in the most religious way. But Christ does not give us a set of rules to follow, or guidelines for successful Christian living. The Ten Commandments are not Christianity. He is not interested in sacrifice –in other words, what we do for God –to save us. The medicine He treats us with to save our lives is mercy.

Christ's whole purpose for coming to earth was to suffer and die on the cross –to take the damning anger of God down on His own head, so that we are released from it. God the Father is merciful to us because of Christ's death on the cross. We are fully, graciously and joyfully forgiven. The Bible says, "*By His wounds we are healed.*" The Bible also says, "*He does not treat us as our sins deserve, or repay us according to our iniquities.*"

God's mercy to us in the person of Jesus Christ is life-saving medicine. It eliminates all the poison of guilt in our minds and on our consciences. His forgiveness gives us a new lease on life, a new relationship with God. God is holy and because of Christ He declares us to be holy. He loves us with the same love that He has

for His own Son. His mercy heals us. It takes away the scabbed, irritated, coarse exterior of our cynicism, defensiveness, or anger and makes us tender, sensitive and compassionate once again. His love moves us to love. His mercy saves our lives. It rescues us from death and damnation. That's what we receive through Baptism and the Lord's Supper and His Word –the life-saving medicine from our Great Physician.

May Christ always keep coming to us and administering regular generous doses of His mercy to us so that our faith in Him stays whole and healthy until He takes us to our sanitary, heavenly home where the disease of sin no longer pollutes. May we always look to Him for all the healing we need both physically and spiritually.