

Many members. One body united in Christ.

The Festival of St. Matthew  
St. Matthew 9:9-13  
21 September, Anno Domini 2025

Children of God,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we think about the great blessings of the Ascension of our Lord, we likely focus on the fact that we will ascend with Him one day. Perhaps we consider the comfort of our brother in the flesh and the great conqueror of our death sitting at the right of God holding all authority over everything in heaven and on earth. These are certainly true and wonderful gifts which we do well to meditate on daily that they may shape our thoughts and lives.

But the Holy Spirit draws our attention to other gifts which Christ acquired for men. Not miracles. Not lives free of sin and temptation. Not worldly kingdoms or wealth. Paul tells us that Jesus gave us “apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers.” The great gift which Christ gives to His Church, to you His beloved saints, His own body, are those who preach the good news of salvation, who teach the apostolic doctrine. Jesus gave to you those whose mouths absolve you of your sins by Christ’s authority. Jesus gave you those whose hands pour out the washing of Holy Baptism upon you and who place into your hands and mouths the Body and Blood of your Savior. This is how He has commanded that we be saved and kept in the true the faith.

This is God’s good wisdom and mercy. He didn’t choose the angels, those ministers of flaming fire. He does not create faith by a mystical sending of the Holy Spirit known by the speaking of tongues or miraculous healings. He doesn’t subject you to some unique “spiritual” experience. That is what the world expects and what our flesh wants. God loves you too much for such things.

What God does instead is extremely ordinary and maybe even unexpected. But it is also the most sure and certain way that we may have comfort and the assurance of His love. He tells you. Still to this day, He calls and sends ordinary men just like you to preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified for your salvation. He send you men like St. Matthew, once counted among the most despised group of men for his covetous desires who was willing to collect the crushing taxes of the pagan Romans so that he could enrich himself off his brother Jews, to announce to you that the sinless Son of God has made satisfaction for your sins by His Blood and

Many members. One body united in Christ.

that in Him, God is pleased with you.

Who but God would choose such men as Moses or Matthew or Peter or Judas or Paul or me to proclaim the Gospel of salvation to the world? To be absolutely clear, no preacher of the Word of God has any sufficiency in himself to open his mouth and dare to speak on behalf of God - not his intellect or holiness of life or charisma. The preacher who imagines himself either qualified or sufficient will fall under the same judgment as the devil.

The sufficiency of the Office of the Holy Ministry is the Lord Jesus who instituted it and who commanded those whom He placed in His office to baptize, to teach, to pray, to rebuke, to exhort, and to preach. The Word is His. The authority is His. The salvation is His. The Baptism and the Supper are His. The glory is His. Thus, in his Sacristy Prayer, Luther prays “Then if Thou are pleased to accomplish anything through me, to Thy glory and not to mine or to the praise of men, grant me a right understanding of Thy Word and also that I may diligently perform it.”

Certainly if Matthew had considered only himself as he preached and as he prepared his account of the Holy Gospel, he would have despaired. “Who am I to call sinners to repentance? My own sins are awful. I was a liar and a cheat. Why should people believe me when I claim to speak in the stead and by the command of God?” And Matthew would have been right to despair. And those who heard him, if they only considered the man, would have had every right to suspect and reject anything he said or wrote. I certainly am no different. And the devil certainly never lets me forget all the reasons why I am completely unworthy to be standing in this pulpit or sitting and hearing your confession or ministering to you in your need.

But Matthew didn't find his sufficiency or authority in himself. Neither do I. Nor should you. Like a child delivering a message from her parent to her older brother, the confidence of pastors is in the Lord Jesus who sent them. The child has the confidence that it isn't her word. It is the word of the one who commanded her to go. If the brother rejects the word because his little sister is speaking it, he will suffer the consequences. Jesus has commanded us to go. Jesus has commanded us what to say. And He has promised to be with us and bless His Word that He puts in our mouths for your blessing and building up in the truth and in love. That is for your confidence too. You can be utterly confident of St. Matthew's account of the Gospel of Jesus Christ because Jesus Himself, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, caused each and every Word of the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew to come forth from the pen of the apostle. You can be absolutely certain that my

Many members. One body united in Christ.

forgiveness is God's forgiveness because Jesus promised "Whoever's sins you forgive, they are forgiven," and "Whoever hears you, hears me." Your certainty in these things doesn't rest in the man, but in the God-man who instituted the office and put the man there and who gave that man the very words speak.

This is why it is absolutely necessary that your pastor spend copious amounts of time consuming every word which God has spoken. The pastor is called by Christ to speak true words of comfort to all who repent of their sins and seek mercy from Him. The pastor is called by God to speak words of judgment against those who reject God's Word or disobey it or refuse to listen to it, as the prophet Ezekiel in today's reading from the Old Testament. Your pastor cannot speak what he doesn't know. And he will be called to account by God on the Last Day for what he has spoken to you. Both the Law and the Gospel are God's Word. Therefore both must be spoken in due season and both must be heard. But how that word is received cannot be of concern to the one speaking. The outcome of the Word of God is wholly up to God. The preacher may be hated or loved for what God has said, but that is not the measure of the truth of what he has spoken or his faithfulness. If he speaks what God has said in Holy Scripture, it is true and he has been faithful. To receive such speaking as from God Himself is an act of faith. The hearer is to receive that true Word as if God were standing in front of him and he is to believe and conform his whole life to that word. He is to rejoice that God has mercifully spoken to him and called him away from his own life of covetousness and idolatry that he too might follow Christ in faith and walk in newness of life.

And it is through the word which men like St. Matthew continue to preach that Christ Jesus causes the whole Christian Church on earth and you in that Church to be built up and strengthened. It is this word which creates in us new hearts and minds as we read it, hear it, mark it, learn it, and inwardly digest it so that we no longer like children think or act like the world. By this Word, attached to water, God drowns your Old Adam and puts to death all sins and evil desire in you and raises to life a New Man who loves the will of God and desires to conform all his life to the Ten Commandments. By this Word God crucifies in you all love of earthly riches and pleasures and forms in you a love of the things of His kingdom. By this Word you are able to recognize the leaven of false teaching wherever it is found and cast it out from your ears and your heart. By this Word you Christ strengthens you to pattern your life after His own so that you might take up your appointed crosses in faith, and in true love, sacrifice yourself for the temporal and eternal good of your spouse, children, family of faith, and neighbor.

By this Word, preached and recorded for you by redeemed sinners like St.

Many members. One body united in Christ.

Matthew, it is made known to you that Jesus came into the world save sinners because He delights in mercy. All that God does is to draw you to His righteousness which He has prepared for you on the cross and gives to you as true food and drink at the altar.

May we then rejoice this and every day for the great mercy of God which called Matthew from the tax collector's booth and caused him to pen the Gospel that bears his name because through it we know Christ and through it Christ has said to also to us "Follow me." And may God grant that we so heed the call that we give thanks to God for this great mercy and receive His Word with joy as it is written down for us in Holy Scripture and preached to us through the Office of the Holy Ministry.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus.