Text: Matthew 9:9-13

**Introduction**

There is a line given by Agatha Christie, the British mystery writer, about the strangeness of what one lives to see. She remarked “I never thought I’d be so poor as to not have a servant, nor so rich as to own a car.”

There are several things that I never thought I’d see in my lifetime.

I didn’t think I’d see a Chicago Cubs World Series Victory.

I didn’t think I’d see a $20 sub sandwich, to which I’d add I didn’t think I’d ever see myself paying $20 for said sandwich.

I didn’t think I’d ever see an American President indicted.

And I didn’t think I’d see so much of the church forget the reason it exists.

**Text**

We are now into the long green season and so our lectionary puts us back in this year’s gospel of Matthew. Way back in Epiphany we were reading from the Sermon on the Mount, before they threw us into John for the Easter season. And due to the placement of that moveable feast of Easter this year we drop the ending of that Sermon and are simply thrown into the middle of the story after it. What falls in between are a bunch of works of power: the healing of a leper, the centurion’s servant, Peter’s mother-in-law and everyone who came to the door. the calming of a storm and the exorcism of the Gadarene demoniac into the herd of pigs.

While Jesus is performing these works of power – these miracles – he interacts with various people. Some come up to him declaring their obedience. “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go!” To which Jesus replies, “Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head.” You say this now, awed by the miracles, but the reality of the way is a bit different. Others Jesus actively calls and they respond, “let me first go and bury my father.” To which Jesus replies, “let the dead bury their dead, but you follow me.” You do not know if the Spirit will pass this way again. If you hear him today, do not let anything get in the way of your response.

And these lead up to the climatic action, the story that you all know of 4 friends lowering their paralytic friend through the roof. What you probably forget is that Jesus says first, “Your sins are forgiven.” Which was probably a let down bringing their friend to the miracle worker. But the Pharisees get bothered by it and declare it blasphemy. Only God can forgive sins. Jesus asks them which is harder to say, “your sins are forgiven, or rise and walk?” And then turns to the man and says “pick up your bed and go home.”

What miracle did Jesus come to do?

Reading the gospels Jesus strikes me as a scab picker. He just can’t leave things alone. If he was here to win friends and influence people, after making his point with the paralytic, he’d have looked for a way to smooth things over with the Pharisees. But that isn’t what Jesus does. That is never what he does. Jesus walks on and “spying a man called Matthew sitting at a tax booth, he says to him ‘follow me.’”

The tax collector. Now none of us like IRS agents. If you have your own business or fill our the sub-chapt-S forms, this year with 87K new ones might be the year to have a professional file them for you. But however much we don’t like them, what we think is not what those Jews think. They think traitor. This is someone who has sold his own people out for some Roman coin. And this traitor continues to have power over them. Jesus spies this one and says “follow me.” What better scab to pick.

And the Pharisees in the way I read it aren’t flummoxed, but on the attack. They go to his disciples, “are you ok with this?” “Why does YOUR teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” It is every attack ever on guilt by association. Your teacher eats with them, what kind of teacher is he? What kind of learners are you? It would be much better for you to disassociate from him. And for him to get back into line.

But Jesus hears them and gives them their answer. Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners? “The well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick…I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

**Christology**

Jesus the great physician does work the miracles, but the miracle that he’s come to work is the forgiveness of sins. Jesus has come to call those who are soul sick to spiritual health. Jesus has come to tell those who cannot by their own reason or strength get up and walk, to rise and walk the way. Jesus has come to call those who have turned traitor to God to his table.

We Lutherans tend not to like medical metaphors. We love the legal metaphors: adoption, inheritance and the like. There is a bright line, before and after. We like the sacrificial metaphors: Christ the priest, Christ the lamb. The action has happened. Even the commercial metaphors: ransom, redemption, remission. We are the people of the gospel revelation, I once was blind, but now I see. I took one of my favorite little books off the shelf just to check. JAO Preus, long after his time in Synodical office and after his scholarly tomes, wrote a practical book called “Just Words”. He walks through the various biblical metaphor for Christ’s justification. It’s a great little book, but it’s not there – the physician.

Maybe if we limited sin to an Acute case we’d like it more, but sin is Chronic, isn’t it? We can talk about being healed, but in this life there is also a way that we are never truly free of it. As Paul would say, “sin lives in my members.” Christ the Physician has come to treat us. Jesus sinners doth receive. If you’ve got the sin equivalent of a bullet to the heart, here is the man who can give you a new heart. If sin is more like those ailments that sap the life and weigh you down, here is the one who answers prayer, the balm of Gilead, the bread of life.

Christ came for sinners, for the sick, for those who need a physician.

**Moral**

But that sets up the conundrum. Nobody likes the doctor. The sick need a doctor. And I’m not sick. Or it’s just a cold. Or I’ll feel better with a little rest. Or let me change my workout a bit and I’ll get that energy back.

He came to call sinners. Nobody else. The healthy don’t need the physician. Those who think they are righteous, just continue on your way. Maybe we’ll see you later, although the doctor might be out at that time.

You have to admit that you aren’t just one deadlift, one good night’s sleep, one self-help book away from wholeness. We have to admit that we need the doctor. We have a terminal case of sin and cannot heal ourselves.

And that is the dual purpose of the church. To proclaim the law so that we all know that we are sinners. And to proclaim that sin has a physician, the man on the cross.

How so much of the church has forgotten this, I don’t know. Jesus is pretty clear. This is why I have come, to call sinners.

And if you are in the business of calling sinners, your tables will be full of them. Traitors, stinking, shameful, pus-ridden, helpless, hypocritical, sinners. All looking for the only cure that works. That is the fellowship of this altar – sinners. Sinners called by Christ – “follow me.”

**Eschatological**

The chronic nature of sin will eventually get us. The wages of sin are death. But even here Christ has turned what was simply the horror into the final cure.

You have been given the Spirit which renews you from within. We share the mind of Christ already. And eventually we shall receive the final treatment, the resurrection of our bodies. New bodies. No longer bodies of sin, but bodies made perfect.

Our fight, our following, will wear out this out tent, but we are being renewed daily. One day, one day soon, the aches and pains of carrying the cross will be healed by the great physician who will craft for us all that immortal body which shall feel no more pain.

Christ came for sinners, to give us life eternal. Amen.