

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

2353 Rice Boulevard, Houston, TX 77005-2696 ctk@ctkelc.org ctkelc.org
713-523-2864 Telephone

DAY OF MATTHEW, APOSTLE AND EVANGELIST FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 21, 2025

Ezekiel 2:8-3:11; Psalm 119:33-40; Ephesians 2:4-10; Saint Matthew 9:9-13

In nomine Jesu!

By the time we get to this episode in the Gospel, Jesus already had an eventful ministry. Before this episode, he had already called eleven disciples to “follow” him; and they had already:

- heard Jesus preach the sermon on the mount;
- experienced Jesus’ power as he calmed a storm on the sea;
- witnessed several miraculous healings; and
- marveled at the breadth of Jesus’ caring for people as familiar as Peter’s mother-in-law; as despised as a Roman centurion’s slave; and as shunned as not one, but two, crazed, violent, homeless Gentile tomb dwellers whose demons Jesus drove into a stampeding, over-the-cliff drowning herd of pigs.

They had seen it all.

Overall, they were a cohesive group. All Galileans; and poor; living barely subsistent lives. They shared a hatred for their Roman oppressors and the self-described “great ones” in Jerusalem - mostly priests – who collaborated with the Romans to keep them and their fellow Jews under control. One of them, Simon the Zealot, was even a violent political activist. None were members of the clashing First Century Jewish sects: Pharisees, Sadducees, or Essenes. While they jostled among themselves about “who was the greatest,” they were otherwise copacetic in every discernable way.

Then Jesus invited Matthew to join them by following him.

They were no longer “happy campers.” Matthew embodied everything they despised. He was rich, which he proved when he threw them a lavish dinner. He got rich by cheating them and others because that’s what tax collectors did. He was

a lack of oppressive Rome and of Rome's wealthy and privileged Jewish collaborators. Unlike the way he is often portrayed, as in the streaming series "Chosen," Matthew had to be strong, self-assured, and arrogant; educated; able to read, write, count, and converse in Latin, Greek, and Aramaic. He was an elite; they were country bumpkins. Because Jesus called him and because Matthew agreed to follow Jesus with them, those eleven had to learn to include him: to live, work, travel, talk, listen and discuss their hopes, dreams, and concerns about their own and their people's future with him. Most difficult of all, they had to learn to trust him because Jesus did. Put simply, Matthew's was the polar opposite of them. That makes today's gospel and its implications most relevant for us as we strive to be church together as fellow disciples of Jesus Christ living in this, often violently divisive time, increasingly violent world, and progressively polarized nation.

Put simply again, when, in the First Century, Matthew joined the Eleven at Jesus' invitation, that apostolic band became just like us in the Twenty-First Century today: namely called by Christ, nourished by Christ, and one in Christ yet divided, often vociferously, by our politics.

Before talking about what we do next, there are four pieces of motivating Good News in this episode and all that follows in the Gospels and the earliest history of Christ's Church. "In Christ" is the key.

1. it is Jesus, not political agreement, who brought them and brings us together to do God's work in this time and place. We are together in Christ, not because we agree, but because Jesus called us and we all continually experience Christ's call together in this place.
2. Jesus stayed with them; taught, nourished, and encouraged them then, just as Jesus continues to do the same to us today; breathing into us the ever-flowing power and strength of the Holy Spirit, binding us together in faith, hope, and love.
3. Jesus entrusted them and us with God's mission to others. Christ brought them – and us – together; holds them and us together, sent them and sends us

out together for the sake of the wholeness of creation, our society, God's world, and all that dwell therein.

4. Jesus only gave them and us one limitation for communal discussion and public participation, speech, and action. That limitation is that we be non-violent. "Put your sword back in its place; for all who take up the sword will perish by the sword." Matthew reports Jesus saying after his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane and after Peter had cut off the ear of the high priest's slave.
5. Jesus modeled that non-violent behavior standing silent and firm and then going to an oppressor's cross to die.

And God raised Jesus from death; saying "yes" to Jesus' life and example and sending us the Holy Spirit to fearlessly follow that example together.

As those Twelve were, so are we. We do not agree politically. Some of us are vociferously public about our political position; none of us are going to stop. Yet all of us are called together to listen, first to Christ, then to one another. All of us are Holy Spirit empowered to speak, discuss, debate, even argue with one another, without labels, rancor, shame, fear, or threat of violence; not as political opponents increasingly despising the other, but as siblings in Christ, increasingly loving one another for Christ's sake. That's perhaps the most important witness we can give in these gray and latter days.

This is my hope and prayer for us together. That by our love for one another we publicly proclaim what we are about to sing with one another, that "all depends on our possessing," not power, victory, nor dominance or authority over others, but "God's free grace and constant blessing" enabling us, and all, to "safely anchor in God's grace." God grant this for Jesus' sake and for the sake of a broken, divided, and hurting nation and world. Amen.

Amandus J. Derr

Interim Senior Pastor

