

Matthew 9:9-13

February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2020

“Keep your Head Down”

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

4<sup>th</sup> S.A. Epiphany

Vicar Miguel Gonzalez-Feliciano

Grace, Mercy and Peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

**Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:**

**[*Keep your Head Down*]**

Keep your head down. It's a piece of advice that can be used for a variety of situations. When trying to shoot on goal in soccer, you should keep your head down to keep the ball low, or else you'll shoot way over the crossbar. Swinging a bat in baseball requires that you keep your head down to get the proper contact. In golf, you have to keep your head down because...Well, I can't really say why, I don't know much about golf, except that I'm bad at it. In sports, keeping your head down is an important aspect to having good form, keeping your head down helps keep you focused.

Jesus was constantly doing this in His ministry. Throughout His time on Earth, you and I don't read about a Messiah who was constantly getting sidetracked, missing the obvious things or having to be brought back on task by His disciples and His Heavenly Father.

Jesus was so focused on the people who were in front of Him.

From His baptism to the Cross, Jesus knew what the mission was, and He made sure that He met people who needed to see the Messiah. In our reading today, Jesus makes it extremely obvious what kind of people He is focused on.

***“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”***

Jesus says this after calling a man named Matthew. Up until now, in the Gospel according to Matthew, you and I haven't read too much about this Matthew character, and we don't know what to expect from him. He is a tax collector who is sitting at a booth, probably keeping his head down.

### **[ *Matthew Called Out* ]**

Keep your head down has a very different meaning in the world of business and academics. In those spheres, it means to go about your work, to make sure you're unnoticed. Don't be the one who stands out for any reason, good or bad. Don't try to go the extra mile, but also don't fall below set standards, keep your head down and you'll be fine. Troublesome kids are told to do this when they go off to class, "Just keep your head down, stay out of trouble and you'll be fine," Cooperate, Assimilate, and Graduate.

Nobody cares if there is a focus or a lack of focus, this kind of keeping your head down is all about maintaining the status quo and getting by with as little trouble as possible. You won't ever get promoted or recognized for anything, but neither will you incur the wrath of others.

Watch out for yourself, nobody else will.

While there is no definitive proof, I can't but help and think that this might have been the case with Matthew. He was a tax collector of Herod Antipas in Galilee, so he probably wasn't considered a full traitor to his own people, but still, he was a tax collector. In our reading today, Matthew was simply sitting at his booth. Doing his job, keeping his head down. He wasn't up in a tree like Zacchaeus. Matthew was simply at his booth ready to collect taxes. It should have been a day like any other.

Then Jesus calls out to Matthew.

“Follow me.”

***[Lift Your Head Up]***

Two words. That was all it took for Matthew to abandon the only way of life that he knew. It wasn't a necessarily glamorous or extraordinary life that Matthew was leaving behind. It was a life of counting coins and making sure that the money kept coming for Herod Antipas. Unremarkable by all accounts. And yet, Jesus called him. He called him into the remarkable. Matthew didn't know it, but he was about to embark on a journey that would give him a front-row seat to the Messiah who was about to change the world in the most remarkable way.

In the next chapter alone, Jesus gathers his disciples and gives them authority over unclean spirits, he gives them the ability to heal every disease and affliction. Matthew was meant to go out with the other disciples and proclaim, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” This was a life that was all about lifting his head up and seeing the people around him. Jesus even warns the disciples that persecution will come, they will be flogged and dragged before governors and kings for the sake of Christ. This was not going to be a life on easy street, it was going to be grueling and difficult.

It's the same life you and I are called to.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Christ has called you out of death and into life, so that you may have life in the fullest! You and I have been entrusted with the Gospel so that it would be spoken to the world that so desperately needs it. It's a remarkable calling unlike any other you have in your life. It's a sharing in the hospitality of Christ. Notice that after the calling of Matthew, Jesus sits down to eat with the tax collectors and sinners.

This is what the Pharisees saw that made them question the Disciples, why would Jesus share a meal with *these* people? They can't elevate Christ's social status! They can't offer anything good to Jesus!

Just like you and me.

The Devil is constantly trying to tell you not to care for your neighbor. He tells you to chase after careers, pleasure, or self-interests. Don't try to go the extra mile, but also don't fall below set standards, keep your head down and you'll be fine. Don't worry about anyone else except for yourself, they have no way to elevate your status, nothing to offer you.

**[...Keep Your Head Down]**

Martin Luther said it right, "we are all beggars,". You and I are poor miserable sinners who have nothing to offer Jesus for His amazing grace, and yet he is preparing rooms for us in the house of His father. Jesus invites us to this table so that you and I can eat His body and drink His blood. He invites people who don't have anything to offer, no way of adding value to the Gospel that God has given. Because this hospitality is not about you, it's about Jesus. His hospitality is all about bringing the greatest value possible to our lives. Brothers and sisters in Christ, if this is the hospitality Christ showed to Matthew, to you and me, then it should be the hospitality that we show to the world. Because the focus of Christ hasn't changed, even after all these years. When Christ kept His head down, it was to focus on bringing you the Gospel. Now, He uses you and I to bring about the Gospel here on earth.

The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

Keep your head down, focus on the Gospel.

Show Hospitality.

Amen.

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As followers of Christ, "Keep loving one another earnestly

And show hospitality to one another without grumbling." AMEN! (1Pt 4:8-9)

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