

Thanks for prayers.

You ever get the feeling that you don't know if you're coming or going? Life's pulling you in different directions and you can't remember why you're driving down the road or whose number you just dialed. "I don't know whether I'm coming or going!"

I ask that by way of introduction because as Christians we are literally coming and going. We are at the same time called out of the world and sent back into the world; it's not like we're going round and around the revolving door, but we are literally headed in both directions at once - we **are both** a called people and a sent people; what Alec Vidler has described as a 'holy worldliness.' This week's Gospel passage is the *calling* of Matthew and next week's Gospel

is the *sending out* of the 12 apostles, so this week we're talking about how we're called out of the world, and next week will be about how we are sent back into the world.

So this week as we're reflecting on the calling of Matthew and that we are a called people, called out of the world, we want to think about two things; first, we want to think about what we are called *from*, and we want to answer that with our second point, thinking about what we are called *to*.

Page 1034 in the Pew Bible. Chapter 9, Verse 9.

It says Jesus saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. Pretty understated, really, when you're talking about a guy leaving behind one life and entering a new life that's virtually the opposite of the way he'd been

living. See, Matthew was a tax-collector, and tax-collectors were very wealthy, but were abhorred by the Jews. And the reason they were so scorned is that they were men of Jewish birth who worked for the Romans and got rich by extortion – they were traitors of God’s people. In fact throughout the Gospels we see the phrase ‘tax collectors and sinners’ – in their culture they were like crooked cops, but everybody knew it and you couldn’t do anything about it. They were also always ceremonially unclean because of their interaction with Gentiles and because they worked on the Sabbath, and rabbis instructed their pupils that they were never to eat with tax collectors.

So you can imagine the scene, as Jesus and a few fishermen walked up the hot, dusty road to the tax booth. And Jesus says to him, ‘Follow me.’ Now one thing that’s really

interesting about this passage is that this is the calling of Matthew in the Gospel of Matthew; this is Matthew's account of when Jesus called him to be a disciple. And Matthew wants the focus to be on Jesus, not on himself, so he doesn't give us any background about what was going on in his life then, in his mind and his heart. We don't know if he was in the midst of some personal crisis, or if he was asking big questions about the meaning of life. We don't know if his heart was hard and calloused, or if he was lamenting the broken relationships he'd created through extortion. But what we do know is that as Jesus walked up to Matthew, Matthew was now standing in the presence of God. Even to someone as un-religious as Matthew, the open and physical contradiction between the life he'd been leading and the life of the Son of God in front of him must have been incredibly obvious. And in that moment, there

was at least a flash of recognition, a sudden hint of realization that the thing he was living for was not the thing he was created for, that life would somehow be better with Jesus than without Him. Jesus didn't cast a spell over him or hypnotize him or trick him; he simply issued the invitation, "Follow me." You can just imagine Matthew looking down at the table of money, looking up at Jesus, looking down at his fine clothes, looking up at the clothes of the ragged fishermen, looking at his past, looking at his future. And he accepted the invitation. Called out of a life of wealth and into a life of probable poverty, but also called out of a life of empty isolation and into a life of thriving community, out of a life of callous dealings and cruelty and into a life of peace that passes understanding, out of a life expecting the judgment of God, and into a life enjoying the grace of God.

Right this moment, Amy and I have friends who have just flown to Ethiopia in order to adopt a set of one year old twins from an orphanage there. Their biological parents weren't able to care for them, so they abandoned them. But think about the opportunity that these children are being given. Out of a life of constant uncertainty, medical deficiency, parental absence and negligence, and into a life of loving care, provision, education, and above all, they'll be raised to know and love the Lord. No one possibly could say that these two kids would be better off staying in their old situation – the choice is easy.

And while the choice may *seem* a little more difficult for Matthew, or for you and I for that matter, in reality it's not. Becoming a follower of Jesus is like coming home from a

land that we were never meant to live in. It may seem a little scary before you get off the plane, but once you do, you know you're home – where you're supposed to be; Life with Jesus is what Jesus made us for. Are we called away from sinful behavior? Yes. Are we called away from serving ourselves? Yes. But you can distill all that down to the fact that when Jesus issues the invitation to follow Him, He's calling us away from the foreign land of life without Him and to our true Home of life with Him so that we're finally living for what we were created for.

Now as the passage goes on, we see that probably that same day, Matthew has thrown a party for Jesus. And he's invited all his friends, which of course were also tax-collectors and sinners. Now I may mention this scene again next week as we talk about being a sent people,

because as soon as Matthew meets Jesus, he wants his friends to meet Jesus. But this week as we talk about being a called people, I want us to look at Jesus' answer to the Pharisees.

Some Pharisees see that Jesus is hanging out with the riff-raff and predictably they question how any authentic religious person could interact with this sort of crowd. But Jesus answers them "*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*" Now Jesus is being ironic here, because you and I both know that the Pharisees were just as sin-sick as the tax-collectors. But they didn't know it. It's usually a lot easier to convince someone living a blatantly sinful life that they need God's grace than it is to convince someone who's been in church all their life. But anyone who's honest with themselves knows the

things they hide, the false fronts they project. We are all spiritually sick and in need of Jesus the Great Physician.

Then Jesus tells the Pharisees, “*Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’*” He’s quoting from our OT passage this morning, Hosea 6. Now both the Gospels of Mark and Luke also record the calling of Matthew, but only Matthew, telling his own story, includes this quotation from Hosea. It must have been so important to him to remember that Jesus said, *‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’* See the Pharisees were impeccable with offering their sacrifices, following the law to the letter, but they’d never shown Matthew the tax-collector anything but scorn. But then along comes Jesus, offering *mercy*. Mercy’s what saved Matthew – Mercy’s what saves you and me, God’s mercy, given through the Cross. In the passage that Jesus

quotes from Hosea, God is indicting Israel for being mechanically correct in their religious ceremonies but with hearts that are far from God. Our liturgy can be like that, where we just repeat words written in a book without our hearts rejoicing with the meaning and the power of those words. God says to His people, “Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. . . . For I desire steadfast love (or mercy) and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.’ See what God wants for His people is for us to have what we were created for – hearts that know Him, hearts that have found their true home in Him.

And then finally Jesus articulates the reason for his incarnation, “*For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.*” THE SAME GOD that created the galaxies

became a man and came to live among us and die on the cross and defeat death in the resurrection, and he did it for one reason, to call sinners to himself. Sinners like the self-righteous Pharisees, sinners like extorting tax-collectors, sinners like you and me. He came – to call us. We are a called people. Called away from the foreign land of life without Him and to our true Home of life with Him, called out of godlessness to actually participate in God's glory, and we'll talk more about that next week.

For now let's just ask the question – Are you living for what you were created for?

Jesus is calling. Follow me.

Let's pray.