

November 26, 2017

Matthew 9:9-13

“Pick One”

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Pick one (*pictures on screen*). Which one would you rather have move in next door as your brand-new neighbor?

Pick one. To sit next to you in the pew for the next hour here in church.

Pick one. Your son’s new girlfriend.

Pick one. Taking the seat next to you on a cross-country flight.

Pick one. To show up to work tomorrow morning as your new employee.

Pick one. Which is more likely to get to heaven?

Jesus picked one in our Bible story for today. He handpicked Matthew to be one of his disciples. And what a shocking, controversial pick that was. The sinless Son of God picked a notorious, despicable sinner.

Matthew was a tax collector. He was a Jewish man employed by the Romans to collect all sorts of taxes from his own people. He was given Roman license to skim, cheat, swindle, and get rich doing it. Tax collectors like Matthew were hated by everybody.

So when Jesus invites a tax collector into his inner circle, everybody is shocked. “Jesus picked Matthew? That guy’s a scoundrel, a loser. Matthew’s a criminal, a miscreant, a lowlife.” Nobody in their right mind would have picked

Matthew. To be a close, trusted associate of the Messiah? No way! To be an apostle and future leader of the Christian Church? Not my pick.

But Jesus' pick? Matthew. The Lord sees something in the tax collector, something broken but not beyond repair, something precious that only Jesus could redeem.

You could say that Jesus saved Matthew from himself. Just as Jesus saves you and me from ourselves. The Lord looks at us today with his divine sight, and he knows full well there's something broken in us, too; but his love and his grace heal the cracks, smooth the rough edges, make us (like Matthew) fit for service in the Kingdom of God. Jesus sees all of your sins and every one of your imperfections; but he also sees in you a precious child of God that can be redeemed.

There's a powerful, personal application for each of us in the story of Matthew's calling, isn't there? We're all Matthews, in a sense. Jesus redeemed you for a purpose, just like Matthew; and he's given you gifts and opportunities to be used to carry on his mission.

With Matthew, we follow Jesus in service to others. With Matthew, we follow Jesus in proclaiming the Gospel, and loving our neighbors selflessly. With Matthew, and with all our Christian sisters and brothers, we follow Jesus in devoting ourselves to helping people around us come into the Kingdom of God. Jesus picked Matthew, and he picked you, too. His love has embraced you, his sacrifice on the cross has forgiven you, his Spirit is equipping you to make a difference in this world in Jesus' name.

Now you pick one (*pictures*). Can you connect with one of these? With one of the least of Christ's brothers or sisters

out there? Pick one. Can you share your faith with one?
Invite to church just one? Offer care and attention to one?

Maybe your new neighbor. Or that new co-worker. Maybe it's someone you'll meet today here at church. Maybe it's a friend who's hurting, someone whom you know is broken, lost, or lonely. Can you pick one?

Just so we're clear about this, Jesus didn't just pick one. Notice in our Bible story what happens after Matthew starts following Jesus. Right away, Jesus goes to a party at Matthew's house. Matthew welcomes Jesus and his disciples, but he also invites his other friends. There's a whole bunch of tax collectors and other sinners at this party.

When the Pharisees, the religious bigshots in town, see this going on, they murmur against Jesus. "Why is he hanging out with all these awful villains?" they ask. They don't understand why Jesus would pick any of these terrible sinners.

But here's the amazing thing about this story, and about our Lord. Jesus doesn't ever pick just one. Jesus picks them all. Jesus wants them all. Why go to a party with a bunch of shady characters? Why hang out with sinners? Because Jesus knows that inside each and every one of them is a precious child of God who needs to be loved, forgiven, healed, saved. And Jesus is the one to do it.

Jesus wants them all. Jesus picks not one, but all.

And rightly so. Isn't he, in the end, King of all? Don't we acclaim Jesus Christ to be Lord of all, Savior of all, Lamb of God for all, and Servant to all?

Then shouldn't we, Christ's Church, be open to all?
Shouldn't we, Christ's people, freely embrace one and all?
Shouldn't we care about every one of our neighbors – no

matter what they look like, or what color their skin is, or how comfortable we are with their occupations or lifestyles or backgrounds? Don't they all need God's Word, as we do, God's Law and his Gospel? Shouldn't we reach out in Christian love to anyone who needs help, and help them, one at a time, come to know the One who can heal their hurts?

Start with just one. Pick one. Following Jesus, who picks us all.

On this Thanksgiving weekend, I just want to say "Thank you" to God, who provides us with the means to help others in Jesus' name. We've been given so much, haven't we? We've been blessed beyond what we deserve, and our God gives us daily opportunities to use what he's given us for his glory.

I talked in my sermon two weeks ago about the opportunities that our church has right now. There are so many new families and individuals moving into the communities nearby. Jesus wants them all. Jesus picks them all. He wants to get to know them all, and all of them to know his love and care.

And I believe, deep down inside, that Jesus is using, and will continue to use, this church to reach many of them. What can you do to help? What can you do to support the Lord's work here? How can you use your time, talents, and treasures to serve and bless others in Christ's name?

Pick one. Amen.