

Jesus: Still Calling, Still Healing, Still Leading

Based upon Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26

Terry Putnam

Based upon Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26

I want to begin today by acknowledging what we all may be feeling since hearing the news of Paul's resignation. In addition to sadness:

- We might be feeling that things are uncertain, even unsettled.
- We might be wondering what's going to happen next. Who will guide us? Will the church be okay?

Hopefully, today's gospel reading brings us some comfort. Jesus met people right where they were in life--at work, at a time of profound grief and during prolonged suffering. Jesus offered each of them mercy, hope, and a path forward.

That matters for us right now. In a time like this, it is easy for our minds to race ahead. We begin imagining every possible outcome. We ask questions we cannot yet answer. We feel the loss of what has been familiar, and we wonder what will take its place.

But the gospel does not begin with a five-year plan. It begins with the presence of Jesus. Again and again in scripture, Christ meets people before he explains everything to them. He comes first with presence, then with direction; first with compassion, then with clarity. That is good news for a church in transition, because it means we do not have to know everything in order to trust the One who does.

Matthew

In the passage, Matthew is not praying. He is not seeking God. He is not doing anything admirable.

He is sitting at his tax collector's desk, minding his own business, doing a job that made him despised, distrusted, and socially rejected. And into that space, Jesus walks up and says two simple words:

“Follow me.”

No lecture. No prerequisites. No spiritual résumé required. Just an offer for a new life.

He calls Matthew *as he is, where he is, in the middle of what he is doing*.

And Matthew gets up and follows.

That response from Matthew is remarkable not only because it is immediate, but because it is trusting. He does not know all that lies ahead. He does not receive a complete explanation of where Jesus will lead him. He simply hears the voice of Christ and takes the next faithful step. There is something important in that for us. Faith is not always having a full map. Often, faith is simply trusting God enough to take the next step when the way ahead is still unfolding.

My mother used to tell me when I worried about a change in my life: “When God closes one door, he opens a window.” Jesus does more than interrupt our routine or “close the door”—he opens a “window,” a new future.

As Paul prepares to leave, and as we feel the uncertainty of that change, Christ's invitation is still the same: trust Him enough to take the next step. That call comes to us as a congregation now, inviting us to appreciate what has been, but asking us to move forward with courage into what God already is doing, and will continue to do, for us.

Jesus Dined with Sinners

Matthew also tells us that Jesus dined with sinners. The Pharisees, not surprisingly, were appalled. Jesus reminded them that God is not concerned with outward religious performance or with keeping up appearances, but cares more when people are hurting, excluded, or in need of grace.

Our church will be okay through this transition, not because we are flawless, but because Christ's mercy is the foundation that holds us together. He will be walking with us at every step in this new journey and responding to our needs as a church. Even now, something holy is unfolding for us. We just need to have the patience and faith to wait for it to be revealed.

And that same mercy is what we will need to show one another in this season of change. We will need mercy for one another as we grieve, as we adjust, and as we ask questions from different places in our hearts. Some will feel ready for what comes next, while others may still be absorbing the news. Some will want answers quickly, while others will need time. Mercy makes room for all of that. Mercy helps us listen before we judge, pray before we panic, and stay compassionate toward one another while the future is still taking shape.

It's Not Too Late

By the end of today's reading, Jesus brings life where others had already given up hope—Matthew was stuck in a life that was reviled, the woman had suffered for years with no relief, and the Pharisee's daughter had died. Jesus is still at work in places and situations that seem fragile, unfinished, or even final.

What ties these stories together is that none of the people Jesus meets are in neat, settled circumstances. Matthew is morally compromised and socially rejected. The woman is exhausted by years of suffering. The father is standing in the unbearable grief of loss. Yet none of those situations are beyond the reach of Christ. Jesus is not intimidated by mess, delay, sorrow, or uncertainty. He moves toward all of it with authority and compassion. And that means we can trust him with what feels unresolved in our own life together. Even here—even now—Christ is still calling, still healing, still leading.

Conclusion

Change is hard, even when we know it's part of God's plan.

When someone who has walked with us, prayed with us, and preached to us for four and a half years gets ready to leave, of course it leaves a gap. Of course it can make us wonder what comes next.

But we've experienced times of uncertainty before. Remember this church was never built around one person.

It is built on our common faith, our shared journey, our care for this community, and our commitment to follow Christ.

We may not have all the answers today, next week, or next month, but we are not alone. **Christ is still with this church**, and he will keep leading us one step at a time.

AMEN

Let us pray.

Gracious and loving God,
we come to you today with thankful hearts,
grateful that you are a God who sees us, calls us, and holds on to us.

When things feel uncertain, you are our steady guide.
When life is changing, you are our strong foundation.
And when we are unsure about what lies ahead,
you remind us that you are already there, walking with us.

Lord, we lift this church up to you—
this community you have gathered, loved, and cared for.
You know our questions, our worries, and our hopes.
You know the changes we are facing.

Give us courage, O God:
courage to trust your guidance,
courage to follow where you lead,
and courage to believe that you are still at work among us.

Fill us with your Spirit.
Help us care for one another during this time.
Remind us that the future of this church
does not depend on us alone,
but on your faithful care.

We place our trust in you, Lord—
today and in all the days ahead.

In the name of Jesus Christ,
who calls us, heals us, and leads us, we pray.

Amen.

Benediction

Go in peace and remember that Christ goes with you.

Go knowing you are called, loved, and never alone.

Do not be afraid of what lies ahead, because the One who calls you
is walking with you every step of the way.

And may the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you today and always.

Amen.