

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 2
Saturday, June 10, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, June 11, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

“And Yet Christ Loved Us”

Matthew 9:9-13

When we look at the world around us, and we see all of the problems of our society, it seems quite clear to many what the world needs. The world needs more Pharisees. It seems that if the Pharisees dominated our society we would not have the problems that we do. If the world were filled with Pharisees, we would not have the crime problem in our country. No one would have to lock their doors at night. People would feel safe and secure even if they were walking through Chicago or Detroit after hours.

After all, the Pharisees did not break into people’s houses and steal. They did not lurk around corners waiting to kill. They did not have open, public displays of immorality. As best as they knew, they were free of sin. The Pharisees had gone to great lengths to establish laws in the land forbidding any activity that might lead to sin. They had hundreds of laws meant to maintain the strictest order in their society. In keeping these laws, the Pharisees felt safe and secure.

Jesus comes along and tells the people that He did not come to call the “righteous,” but “sinners.” Christ’s message is lost on anyone who feels “safe and secure” – whether they feel safe and secure in their sinning, or if they feel safe and secure based on the merit of their own good works. Christ came to redeem those poor, miserable sinners who confess that they have sinned in thought, word, and deed by what they have done and by what they have left undone – a concept the Pharisees would not have even considered. Jesus dispels any notion that a person, other than Himself, would be able to fulfill God’s Law and live a life pleasing to God without putting faith and trust in the mercy of God through the forgiveness of sin.

From a worldly perspective, the Pharisees can provide a “safe and secure” society in which to live. And on the outside, that sort of society seems to be desirable. But not in God’s eyes. And in reality, the history of legalistic governments has not generally been beneficial for the well-being of the people.

Forcing people to obey strict laws may change some people’s outward behavior, but it will never change their hearts. It will never change their minds. What the world needs is not more Pharisees. Nor does the world need more people comfortable living in their sin – whether that sin remains in secret or it is proudly flaunted for all the world to see. What the world needs is to be led to

repent, receive God's forgiveness won for us by Christ's death on the cross – with the following response to be the Holy Spirit creating in us the desire to do good works and follow the will of God. Christ says, "Follow Me."

A woman from one of my previous congregations once said to me that she felt uncomfortable around me, and she felt uncomfortable in church, because, as her pastor, she looked at me as being clean and unblemished, while she felt dirty and unworthy. She felt as if I were unapproachable. (Clearly she had not gotten to know me.)

I did not know how to respond. As I thought about it, it frightened me. Because that is the same way that the tax collectors and "sinners" felt about the Pharisees. They felt unworthy to associate with the "good" people of the world. And worse yet, these so-called "good people" were among the worst offenders in the sight of God, but they certainly would never lower themselves to associate with a "sinner." Unfortunately, these same things go on today.

Christ did not come to call these self-proclaimed "righteous" people. If a person feels safe and secure in the life and lifestyle of their choice or see their good works as their doing which makes them pleasing to God, they will never acknowledge the fact that they are poor, miserable sinners.

The tax collectors and "sinners" were acceptable to Christ, and we are

acceptable to Christ, not because we are “good” people, but because we have been brought to see and confess that we are not. We are worthy in the sight of the Lord, because we know and confess that we are unworthy. To the world around us, this makes no sense. But then, to the world, the answers to our problems are found in either flaunting depravity and declaring evil to be good or clinging to the laws of the Pharisees.

We know that our only hope is in the Good News of Jesus Christ. As Martin Luther says in the “Word from Martin Luther” in your bulletin, “The whole human race was worthy of hatred, and yet Christ loved us.”¹ There is no one whom God places in your path who should be considered unapproachable – whether you deem them to be in your mind clean or unclean, blemished or unblemished.

Whether we have sinned in public or in secret, we are all equally deserving of God’s wrath and punishment. And whether we have confessed public or secret sins, God has forgiven us equally and completely because Jesus took that guilt from us. We are forgiven in Christ and called to be His own, just as He forgave Matthew the tax collector and called to Him and said, “Follow Me.” “The whole human race was worthy of hatred, and yet Christ loved us.” Amen.

¹LW 51:46.