

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Second Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday, June 6, 2026, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, June 7, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

“Jesus Calls Us Where We Are”

Mt. 9:9-13

I have to explain this for the sake of the younger generation. Back in the days of my youth, the year is 1977, there was no Internet available to the public, there were no DVR's or DVD players. Cable TV was in its infancy, and we did not get it until the early 80's. We had four channels (the three networks and a UHF channel). The big events of the entertainment industry were TV Miniseries.

Everybody, and I mean everybody I knew, watched “Roots” when it was televised over eight consecutive nights in January of 1977. And you had to watch it in the televised time slot. You could not record it. One thing that this created was cultural cohesion. Sunday night, we were all watching the same thing. Monday at school, or at work, we had a common experience that we could all share.

Unfortunately, that has been lost with the near infinite amount of entertainment options. The most conservative estimate is that YouTube alone has 800 million videos which would take 82,000 years of constant viewing to watch them all – with more content being uploaded every day – including this Divine Service.

In the Spring of 1977, if asked, “What was the source of cultural cohesion in the entertainment industry, the obvious answer would be the release of the first Star Wars

movie in May of that year. Everybody that I knew, except for my father, went to see that movie.

However, in the Spring of 1977, there was another source of cultural cohesion in the month of April. On Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, there was a two-part miniseries entitled Jesus of Nazareth. The cast consisted of the biggest stars of the day: Laurence Olivier, Christopher Plummer, Anthony Quinn, even James Earl Jones had a cameo appearance as one of the wise men.

Each episode was three hours long. I vividly remember two scenes, one from each night of the miniseries. It was Easter evening and we were at our good friends home, the Lohmeyer's, as we were every Easter, all watching it together in their basement. And I remember Jesus coming out wearing the crown of thorns and Mark Lohmeyer, who was a little older than me, made a comment on the crown of thorns, and that got me fixated on that crown thinking how much that would hurt.

But the scene I remember from the first night was the call of Matthew as a disciple. Jesus is eating with Matthew and other tax collectors and "sinners" – the members of society who were outcast from respectable society (and many of them for good reason).

In the movie, because there needs to be six hours of content, there are conversations which do not appear in Scripture. The one that caught my attention was a conversation among Pharisees and the other disciples concerning Jesus eating with

Matthew the tax collector and his cohort of other sinners. In the movie, Peter, in particular, hated Matthew. Peter was a fisherman, a businessman. For every fish he sold, Matthew had the authority to tax him on the sale, or the movement of the product.

In the movie, at first, Peter could not understand why Jesus would eat with him, have fellowship with him, thereby demonstrating that all is forgiven. As a carpenter, Jesus would have had to pay taxes on all His work which He sold (and everybody knows that the tax collectors were overcharging and making themselves rich). In the movie, what Peter had to come to realize is that Jesus calls us where we are, not where we should be.

In the minds of many, there are imaginary boundaries where reaching out past those boundaries with the Gospel is futile, at best. In calling Matthew, Jesus calls to faith someone who many would see as being beyond redemption or not even worth being saved. We should never be glad or feel a sense of vindication or “dance on the grave” of anyone who we perceive to be our enemy or to be outside of Christ and therefore deserve what they get.

Ezekiel proclaims, “Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?” [Eze. 18:23] There is no place that Jesus won’t go. The Gospel is to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth, as Jesus tells His disciples.

We can all be thankful to God that we do not “get what we deserve.” Thanks be to God that He is not simply a God of “fairness.” But rather, He is a God of mercy.

Thanks be to God that there is no moral pedigree that makes us qualified for the Kingdom of God. St. Paul called himself the “chief of sinners” [1 Tim. 1:15], “the least of the apostles” [1 Cor. 15:9], “the least of all the saints” [Eph. 3:8]. If Paul is the chief of sinners, the least of the saints, and only has a place in the Kingdom of God because God is merciful and gracious, where do I have room to boast?

Again, Jesus calls us where we are, not where we should be. Not that any of us are where we should be. Jesus did not come into this world to scope out the “right kind of people” to be His disciples. The Holy Spirit did not call us to faith because we are better or smarter than others.

He calls Matthew from the tax booth. He called others, like Peter, Andrew, James, and John, from their fishing boats. He calls others from other places. One of the disciples, Simon the Zealot, was a Zealot – which is basically an anti-Roman terrorist group. The Zealot’s rebellion is what causes Jerusalem to be destroyed in 70 AD.

Where they are when He calls them is not the focus. Where they are is where Jesus went to find them, to find us. Where they went, and where we have now come, is the place where we can be His disciples.

What a comfort it is to know that the lost sheep aren’t responsible for finding the Good Shepherd. He comes to us where we are, finds us, and says, “Follow Me.” Amen.