

## Homily for Friday in the Fifth Week after Pentecost

July 3, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Year 2, Proper 8: Amos 8:4–12\*; Psalm 119:1–8; Matthew 9:9–13*

Each of us has many surprises along the way in the work that we take up across the years of our lives. Looking back on my own journey, I would not have predicted how jealous I would become about having time to read and study for my work as parish priest, my life as believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today’s gospel lesson falls between Jesus’ first sermon in Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount, and his second sermon, the Sermon on Mission. Crowds are following him—and so are scribes and Pharisees. Jesus heals. People are amazed; scribes and Pharisees are appalled.

As he walked away from healing a paralytic—yesterday’s gospel, he walks by a place and sees Matthew the tax collector sitting at a table, presumably collecting taxes. “And [Jesus] said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed him.”<sup>1</sup>

I’d like to read Professor Ulrich Luz’s translation of what happens next: “And it happened that [Jesus] was

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 9:9.

reclining at the table in the house, and behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and reclined at the table with Jesus and his disciples.”<sup>2</sup> That’s how they ate. They reclined like, one sees in the movies made about the Mediterranean world Jesus knew.

There is a different kind of relationship at a table in the culture of Jesus’ time and place than we have in our time and place. Hands and feet of guests would have been washed. The objections of the scribes and Pharisees increased. Professor Luz’s gives two translations of Jesus’ response, “Mercy is what I want, not sacrifice!”<sup>3</sup> And after some remarks on Hebrew grammar, he translates Jesus’ response this way, “I desire mercy *more* than sacrifice.”<sup>4</sup>

Matthew writes as a part of a primarily Jewish Christian community—in the last decades of the first century.<sup>5</sup> Jerusalem and its temple are in ruins, destroyed in the year 70, during the Great Jewish Revolt by the Roman general Titus. Treasures of the

---

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 9:10. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 172.

Second Temple can be seen in Rome on the Arch of Titus, whose father and brother were emperors.

Matthew's community treasured its Jewish heritage but knows there is a larger Christian world in their day. Everything is new because the Risen Jesus he is with them and still reclining with them at their table.

A few years ago now, on a Sunday afternoon, I was walking up Broadway, and discovered a group of really extreme Christians who had taken over most of sidewalk between 50th and 51st Street. I hadn't seen the group for some years, but about month ago they returned. All of their literature and signs are designed to make a person afraid of hell. Unfortunately, I was in clericals—and they were not kind. They took me to be a Roman Catholic, but I said to them I was an Episcopalian. Their rant changed as I continued to walk by them. I was saddened and amused more than anything else. I found myself wondering whether they knew Jesus' words about mercy and sacrifice, words that took on new meaning for me that afternoon.

Just one more thing. Professor Luz also draws our attention to these words of Jesus, "It is not the healthy

who need physician but the sick!”<sup>6</sup> He writes that Jews then were suspicious of physicians. They were often ritually unclean.<sup>7</sup> Matthew and his community have moved on from that prejudice of their time and place. By the end of Matthew’s gospel, the Risen Jesus is sending his disciples to all, Jews and Gentiles and promising to be with them always, as the Lord is among us today.<sup>8</sup>

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2020 The Society of the Free Church of St. Mary the Virgin, New York, New York.

All rights reserved.

---

<sup>6</sup> Luz, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 28:20.