



Sunday June 7, 2026

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

So, today's lesson focuses on the calling of Matthew and it kicks off by how we can claim our identities of love as we see this transformation that takes place with Matthew from being a hated tax collector to a devoted follower of incarnate love to Jesus. Matthew was hated for a variety of reasons as you can imagine. Who here loves to hate the tax collector. When you get that envelope from the IRS, do you respond with joy or some choice words? So, Matthew, not only just collected taxes, strike one, but as a Jew, he collected taxes for an occupying foreign power, the Romans, strike two. Now according to the practices of the day, Matthew was allowed to collect whatever he wanted. Rome just wanted their fair cut. So, Matthew and other tax collectors exhorted whatever they could, strike three. So, he was considered a sinner of the worst sort. People shunned him, scorned him and said, "All sorts of mean things about him." Yet Jesus saw him. Jesus loved him and called him anyway.

The world that Matthew lived in was comprised of insiders and outsiders. Now the insiders were the people who knew the rules, kept the rituals and guarded the doors. The outsiders, people like the tax collectors, people with chronic illnesses like the woman with the flow of blood, people who had fallen into shame or found themselves pushed to the margins. Even people who had touched a dead body were considered unclean and were avoided at all costs. Into this insider, outsider world comes Jesus. The gospel tells us that just before this passage of Jesus calling Matthew, he'd been traveling from town to town teaching and preaching and healing, touching lives that were raw and open. He'd been crossing boundaries that polite society wouldn't dare cross. And here he sees Matthew, he does this radical act of love and causes this despised individual to follow him.

So, when Jesus calls Matthew, he breaks the social code. He sits at Matthew's table and he's with all sorts of tax collectors and sinners. And the religious leaders always quick to protect that line of separation between insiders and outsiders, they're scandalized and they ask, why does your



Sunday June 7, 2026

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

teacher eat with sinners? And Jesus answers with the scripture that echoes our Old Testament lesson. I desire mercy or another word kindness, loving kindness, not sacrifice. There's a lesson here for us about where the heart of God lies. God wants kindness from us. God wants mercy, love and the call of Matthew makes that clear. God values being with people more than about being right about the rules. Matthew's story is this story about how the power of small acts of kindness or mercy can shape and rebuild a life. When Jesus sits with him, he breaks bread and he invites him. What's happening is not merely an act of charity. It's a profound statement that says you belong. Your light has value. You are loved and you in turn can love others.

So, the gospel words are plain. Jesus came to heal the sick and calls sinners. Now that phrase can sound a little old fashioned if we don't listen carefully. Sick here is not just about our bodies, but about wounded hearts, lives bent by fear, habits that keep people from living fully. And sinner is not just a moral category. It's much a description of anyone who finds themselves estranged from life, from others from God. It's a technical term of someone who does not or cannot keep the 613 laws that are found in the book of the Torah and the books of the Torah. Can you imagine trying to keep 613 laws? No wonder there are so many outsiders. Jesus who is love incarnate comes for these folks. Not at a distance, not with the list of conditions or a checklist, but with proximity. He moves in close. He sits at their table just as he is at this table here today. He eats with them and calls them by name. God's chosen way in the world is mercy, kindness. It's not this, the occasional act of benevolence. It's just not a tactic to win friends. It's a way that God chooses to be present. I desire mercy, not sacrifice, Jesus says. God values a heart that bends towards others more than rituals that keep people safely apart.

A few years ago, in a mid-sized city, there was a woman named Rosa, who ran a small diner. She had inherited it from her father and she worked long hours and knew all the regulars by name. Then one winter morning, a frail older man comes in who had been sleeping in the doorway and had frost on



Sunday June 7, 2026

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

his scarf. He smelled like winter and hard times. You know what I mean, right? And the regulars started to move away from him. They didn't know him, they didn't like the way he smelled and they were afraid. Now Rosa didn't do a theology class that morning. She did one simple human act. She poured him a cup of coffee. She didn't lecture him, she didn't ask him how he got there. She sat with him for a moment and she asked his name. And over the week, as he could come in, she learned that his name was Henry. He had lost his place after his wife died and his pension didn't cover the repairs that the house needed. And she learned that Henry once played the trumpet in a jazz band and that he could tell a good joke about a broken sax. And she did more than just feed him. She treated him like a person. She folded him into the life of the diner and she listened when he told stories. She let him simply belong.

Maybe we can recognize our own name inside the story of Matthew or Henry. We've all done things that we're not proud of. We've all been on the outside at some point in our life or another. We've turned away from others in need as well. The apostle Paul reminds us that we've all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But the God who called Matthew is the same God who calls us into a new life, into a table of belonging, into mercy that refuses to write people off. So, mercy, kindness, love, that's the heartbeat of God's work in the world. Because Jesus came for the sick, the rejected, the oppressed, and the sinner. He reaches into the places where we are brittle and broken and says, "Follow me." And if we want to follow Jesus, we need to go with him to the frightened migrant or to the confused teenager, to the imprisoned, to the housewife who drinks a little too much on the side or to her husband who sees someone else on the side. To the person who's at the opposite political spectrum from us, we need to look at our heart, our heart where it hurts and feels insecure and rejected. And here again, Jesus's words to us, "Follow me." And to follow in the footsteps of love, as he seeks to show us a better way to live based on these principles of love and mercy and kindness and not fear. If there is one takeaway from today's story, it is this that God's first act to us is loving kindness. And when that kindness touches



Sunday June 7, 2026

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

us, it pushes us out into the world. It changes how we see one another, how we see ourselves. So, may we follow Jesus and become God's presence of love and kindness in this world reaching out into the life of others.