

Feast of St. Matthew 2009

Texts: Proverbs 3:1-6

Psalm 119: 33-40

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Matthew 9: 9-13

“that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”  
Matthew 9:13

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable to you,  
O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

**Happy Eve of St. Matthew’s Day! Fifty-four years ago, on the eve of St. Matthew’s Day in 1955, the founding members of the congregation gathered and chose the name of St. Matthew’s for the new parish they were starting. And the rest, as they say, is history.**

**Today is a day for remembering certainly, but perhaps more importantly, it is a time to look forward, to see a bright future where we grow deeper in faith, deeper in our love for Jesus, and deeper in our response to the community around us.**

**In just a few minutes we will be welcoming back loved members of this congregation and receiving new members. We are blessed to have you back with us, and blessed to go into the future with our new friends that have decided to call St. Matthew’s home.**

**The name Matthew means, “gift of God” and what a gift we have been given in the opportunity to journey together, to share each other’s joys and each other’s burdens. St. Matthew’s is really the perfect name for us.**

**It is the perfect name because of all the Gospels Matthew affirms both old and new, blends the lives and traditions of those that went before with the future of those that are part of the community now. Matthew celebrates continuity and change, tradition and newness. As one writer put it, “Matthew walks in the messy middle.”<sup>1</sup>**

**The “messy middle.” I love that. It sounds very Episcopal to me. And it is. Our faith tradition has always valued the middle way, the “via**

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<sup>1</sup> New Interpreter’s Bible vol. VIII p. 236 1995

media.” It has always valued and found truth in both sides of theological arguments. I think it comes from the abiding belief that the expansiveness of God cannot be contained by our small minds; that no matter what or how we conceive of God, God is always so much more. As humans we put finite boundaries around the infinite and limits on that which is eternal.

But the Gospel of Matthew gives us a glimpse of the abundance of God’s love for us. Matthew shows us that God will call anybody to be a servant of Jesus, anybody, and most assuredly those called to participate in that abundance, expansiveness and servanthood are sinners, are those sick in body, mind and soul. In other words, it is we who are invited to sit and eat with Jesus and to share in all God has to offer us.

It was this graciousness extended to Matthew that changed him from being a publican to being an Apostle. And it is this graciousness offered to us that will change us from being the invited to being the inviter, from being disciples-those that follow, to being Apostles-those who are sent.

This has been a somewhat frustrating week. You see, the doors to the church still don’t have the hardware that would allow someone to grab onto something so that the doors could be opened. I stood outside the front doors and closed them so that I could get the full effect of the new doors. There was only one problem, because there was no handle to grab on to I could not get back in to the church.

I could look through the glass and see where I wanted to be, but I couldn’t get there. No matter how hard I tried I couldn’t budge the door.

I can’t tell you how frustrating it was not to be able to get in. I hurt my fingers trying to pry open the doors from the bottom, but that didn’t work. And I wasn’t strong enough to claw the frame around the glass and try to get enough pull to open them that way either. Quite frankly, I was ready to give up.

Some of you do know how frustrating that is because many of you couldn’t get in the church when you needed and wanted to. Your keys

**to the lounge door, which was re-keyed so that your front door keys would open it, for whatever reason didn't work.**

**I bet those of you who have had that experience in the last week were frustrated and angry too. Imagine that, not being able to get into the church, having such a difficult time that ultimately giving up seemed the only option.**

**I wonder how many people in today's day and age see and experience the Church that way-as having locked doors to them, that no matter what they do, or how hard they try, the message is that they are not wanted.**

**How many people can look in, see what they need and what they want, and yet not get to it, not get to the living Jesus that could heal and comfort them? I wonder how many after trying just give up? My guess is, millions.**

**There is more than one way to solve this problem however, and I want to talk briefly about two of them. The first is getting the hardware on the outside of the doors, giving people on the outside a handle to grasp onto so that they can open the door and walk into the light and love of Christ. It is a handle of hope for those that desperately need it.**

**It was the handle of hope that Jesus offered Matthew-the hope that his life and future could be different. It was the handle of hope that the writer of Matthew offered his community, a community of outcasts from the synagogue, a community under persecution. It was the hope that this fledgling community, this new faith, did indeed have a future even given the immense challenges it faced.**

**It is the same handle that was offered to this fledgling community, in this place, 54 years ago. It is the handle of hope that we must offer to others even given the challenges we face. And let's face it, even though we do have challenges, they are nothing compared to what some communities of faith suffer. We have the hope to spare and we have the hope to share. And that is what we are called upon to do.**

**We can offer this handle of hope to those outside our doors for one reason, the handle is anchored onto the door of faith; the faith received**

**from Jesus Christ and the Church before us. Because we are to grow stronger in faith each day, the faith as we have received it is also the faith we are called to share with others.**

**Sharing this faith and hope requires that we extend ourselves further into the community, that we have a better idea of the community's challenges and needs. Knowing what those needs are is the only way that we can respond in the way God wants us to. It is then that people can grasp onto the life-giving message of the Gospel that we are to bring to them.**

**The second way to solve the problem of people not being able to get in, of feeling locked out and not being wanted, requires that I tell you how I finally got into the church. Someone came from the inside to open the doors for me. The doors opened from the inside out and because of that I could walk into the church. The person who let me in had a smile on her face and was laughing and that turned a frustrating situation into a funny one!**

**Opening the doors of faith and love happens on two levels. First, we are called to work on ourselves from the inside out. We are to deepen our knowledge and love of God by studying scripture, being faithful in prayer and worship and by committing ourselves to God's service. These aren't options; these are commandments. It is working from the inside out that we individually develop the strength to go out and be the light of Christ to those we meet.**

**The second level that this occurs at is opening the doors of our hearts as a congregation to those who are outcasts, to those, like our namesake Matthew, dream of a better life, a life of spiritual solace and abundance. The Gospel of Matthew tells us that the fellowship of the faithful is extended to all types of people, but especially those that want so badly to believe that God cares for them but that haven't seen this acted out in their everyday lives.**

**So much can happen when we open the doors of faith and love to those on the outside. The miracle proclaimed in Matthew's Gospel (and Matthew's Gospel is known as the Gospel of miracles) is that in opening the doors of our hearts we become the door of faith for others, and in extending the handle of hope to others, we become the hope of God for**

**all the world to see. In doing so we are transformed individually and as a community from the inside out and as new people join us, from the outside in.**

**May the light of Christ shine through all our doors-the doors of St. Matthew's and the doors of our hearts, so that we may proclaim the Gospel and be responsive to those around us.**

**Amen.**