

The Third Sunday after Pentecost
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Sunday, June 5, 2005
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

Grace and peace to you from God our father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Don't touch that! Don't go near that! Leave that alone! What are you thinking? Yuck! As a camp counselor for two years, I was always surprised how many times I would have to say these kinds of phrases. More often to the girls, it seemed, because they were always reaching for something that you just shouldn't touch. Things that as adults we know that you don't go near, you don't smell, you don't pick up, and even in some really yucky cases... for goodness sakes, you don't taste!

As we grow up, we learn what these things are... and I'm sure if you are like me, even though you were the little tom boy who was into everything, you are now one of the first to say yuck today. It's a natural reaction when we see something that isn't right, isn't what it should be, and for that matter, isn't what we like.

Our text for today is filled with things that would make others want to say yuck. Perhaps the first come out of the lips of the Pharisees. They see Jesus eating with 'many tax collectors and sinners'. You didn't interact with those people... you didn't talk with those people, you didn't pair yourself with them, and for goodness sake, you didn't eat with them! Yuck! There was nothing worse than that! Sharing the same food, who knows what's in it, and not only that, but sitting at their table!

What they don't see because they are too busy looking for what isn't desirable...what's bad in the situation, is that Jesus doesn't seem to be reacting in the same way. Now, to be perfectly honest with you, he probably should have. He was a good Jew... he knew the law. No matter that he choose this tax collector, but as soon as he sat down to dinner and there were sinners at the table, well, Jesus should have just gotten up and walked out. Who wants to eat with them? At least, that's what the Pharisee's thought.

We might not completely understand why these were the laws, but they were. The Pharisees and the Jewish people were very concerned about things that we don't even think twice about today. Certain people, certain foods, certain bodily fluids, dead things... all of these would have made the Jewish people recoil in disgust. And the reason for them was that all of these things, including the ones who Jesus was now eating with... eating with, can you believe it? Would make them unclean. It would make them need to cleanse themselves... it would make them less worthy of being the people of God. Being unclean meant that you now had to go through rituals of purification and in many cases that meant taking yourself out of the community. No one wanted to do this to themselves, so all of those yucky situations were avoided at all costs.

And all of a sudden, here was Jesus putting himself in the midst of it all. Sitting down with these unclean people... eating whatever it was they gave him. What was he thinking?

Well the only way to learn that was to ask. But they didn't ask him directly, of course not. They asked his disciples, why is he eating with *them*? And you know how they said it, don't you? With that tone in their voice that just drips of disdain and, well, yuck.

Even as Jesus is explaining his actions to the pharisees, another yucky situation happens. A leader from the synagogue... one who knew the laws... comes and asks Jesus to lay hands on his daughter because she has died. Once again, Jesus' reaction should have been I'm not going to do that... that would make me unclean! Touching a dead person was unheard of! There were specific people who did just that, and only they should do it... no one should voluntarily touch a dead person. But Jesus just gets up and follows him... no hesitation is recorded, no debating whether or not he should... there is no question of unclean or not... he just knows what needs to be done and goes to do it.

Jesus seems to be more concerned with greater things... more concerned with life or death than with the fact that he might be made unclean. He follows without hesitation, and on his journey he meets a woman... a woman who knows what it means to not only be unclean, but to also be living as if dead.

Well, maybe that he met her is overstating it a bit. In fact, this woman sneaks up on him. She knows that no one would want to touch her or even get near her. She knows how she is seen by society... she knows that just by touching someone she is not only making them unclean, but also getting herself in trouble because she shouldn't be doing it. But she knows that touching him is her only hope. So she tries to only touch his cloak... not his skin, not his hand... just the tassel on his cloak, and she knows in her heart that that will be enough. And Jesus turns and sees her... maybe she held on for a bit too long and he felt the tug of his clothes. Maybe he just happened to look down. And the way that he should have responded, the way that it was expected was for him to ask "Why did you touch me? What were you thinking?" But instead, He simply tells her that her faith has made her well. Nothing about cleansing herself, nothing about him being unclean from her blood... just that all she had to do was reach out and now she was made whole.

Once Jesus gets to his destination, he goes in and sends the crowd away, for once again, all it takes is his touch and the little girl is fine. He doesn't worry about what is wrong with her... he simply reaches out and brings her back from where ever she was.

I think it would be very easy for us to simply say... wow... those are really nice stories about Jesus and I'm glad that we got to hear them today and then to go on with our lives. But I think that we need to see them as much more than that. We need to see them as instruction... as encouragement... as a guide for how we are to live our lives as God's people.

We, too, like the Pharisees are quick to question the unclean... the dirty... in the world around us. We see things that do not seem right... we see people who are different from us, we encounter those who are not as privileged as we are, and we quickly dismiss them as too different, too far from where we are... But what is Jesus calling us to do?

He is calling us to be among those who are the least! He is calling us to go to where the people are and to meet their needs as we are able. He is calling us to stop worrying about the dirt and yuck and to remember that we are called to touch people's lives. We are called to touch with our hands, with our feet, with our hearts, and with our prayers. We are called to follow, just like Matthew was. But are we able to simply drop everything and follow him as Matthew did, or are we hesitating with each opportunity that is put before us?

Our following takes so many different forms. Maybe it is to volunteer with different ministries in our area that I know many of you are doing each day. Maybe it is covenanting to pray for those around you. Maybe it is giving of yourself completely as we are celebrating with the Dunlop family today, with Jim being ordained into the ministry of word and sacrament and with Sean and Patty as they give up two years of their life to work with the Peace Corps. ...everyone has different gifts, and we are called to use them. Quite simply, we are called to follow... into the prisons, into the slums, into the hospitals, into the schools... where ever it is that we hear his voice calling us to go. It is so easy to say yuck... I'm not going to do that... God can't be calling me to do that... but that is just what we are to do. We are called through the waters of our baptism to answer that voice saying follow me, and we are strengthened for whatever we might face on that journey through the bread and the wine. And it is each day that we are faced with more and more opportunities to answer that Call of Follow me... it might not even be anything that seems big in your eyes, but it could mean the world to those that you touch.

So as we face this week... this week of unknown... this week of chances, I encourage all of us to simply listen. Listen for that voice saying follow me... listen for where it has to lead... and for once simply get up and go... not thinking of what we might encounter or how dirty we might get doing it, but just going because we are called to do just that. Amen.