

## **St Matthew and our call to Mission.** September 21 2025 All Souls' dtw

Jesus said *Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'. For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.* Mt 9.12-13

Today is the Feast Day of St Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector, second only to politicians in the history of corruption down the ages, and there were many Jews like him who were prepared to betray their own people by working in dishonest ways for Rome, the ruling government of that time. You will also remember Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke, a chief tax-collector at Jericho, who wanted to find out about Jesus. Jesus invited himself to Zac's house and all the extortion unfolded in his amazing repentance. People observed that Jesus had gone to the house of a sinner, and we get a similar response from Jesus to my text today: *For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.* Lk 19.10

Jesus called Matthew and he followed; it seems to have been an instant response. The transformation of the squalid tax collector into apostle, evangelist and martyr is a story repeated many times down the Christian ages. After his call, we know very little about Matthew, but we do have a fine Gospel attributed to his name and for many people, it is their favourite Gospel. It has many gems, unique to Matthew. Here are just a few:

Its entire infancy narrative with the annunciation to Joseph, not Mary; the Wise Men, Herod's wrath and the escape to Egypt. Mt 1.18-25, 2.1-23

The parable of the Treasure hidden in the field and the Pearl of great price 13.44-46

So much of the Sermon on the Mount and the full Beatitudes 5.1-7.29

The primacy of Peter among the apostles, and his Great confession 16. 13-20

And perhaps my favourite: Jesus said *Come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* 11.28-30

The Gospel of Matthew highlights the Jewish origin and identity of Jesus. It is truly pitched to a Judaic audience and readership. It pulls no punches. Some scholars today, including Dr Matthew Anstey, are wary of some anti-Semitic tones that lie within and may be later interpolations. Certainly, in Matthew, Jesus is at his strongest against the Scribes, the Pharisees and Jewish leaders, in terms of the institutional Rabbinic Law and Tradition.

One thing is for sure: Matthew's Gospel is, above all the Gospels, an Evangelist's Gospel! Matthew is aimed, fairly and squarely, at conversion. The writer of Matthew is out to convince you that Jesus Christ is King. Why? Because we certainly know that Matthew, the tax collector, now apostle, was converted, like Zacchaeus, into a whole new way of life and living. And he must get people on board – lots and lots of people.

So, now to today 2025. St Matthew is intrinsically linked with us being a Mission-Shaped Church. The Anglican Consultative Council in its 1984 work, Bonds of Affection, has given what still remains the definitive statement: The Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Communion:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers

3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

At the end of Matthew's Gospel we get Jesus' 'Great Commission' to his disciples: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...* (Mt 28.19) Christine Cain, an Aussie Evangelist, once said, "It is the Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion!" Why do you think people might be reluctant to share the good news with others?

One of the things that can often block a person's openness to the call of God is a sense of unworthiness, inadequacy, shortcoming or sin. If that sense has ever come your way, rejoice! There are at least two pieces of good news. You are in impressive company and you are on the right track. The Bible is packed with characters who felt inadequate, unworthy or ill-equipped for the task. Moses couldn't speak properly; Jeremiah was only a youth; Ruth felt forsaken; Amos was merely a pruner of sycamore trees; Isaiah was lost and a man of unclean lips; Matthew was a tax collector; Mary Magdalene had seven demons; Peter was a "sinful man", of his own lips; Paul had a thorn in the flesh, often feeling weak. And that's just a sample! And all of them, as a consequence, were on the right track. Each one fell into the arms of the Living God who took them so much further than they ever expected to go: sent out in mission, armed with all the necessary equipment for the task.

You see, the first thing that God requires of a disciple IS a genuine sense of lacking for the task. The last thing God wants is someone full of a sense of their own self-importance: "Here I am! God's gift to the world!" No, but in fear and trembling, Isaiah said "Here am I" (notice the subtle difference: Here am I: not pride, but humble surrender). In fear and trembling, unworthy Peter lay down the net and followed Jesus of Nazareth, still goofing up along the way. But Peter was powerfully used for the Kingdom. The full Kingdom recipe for every disciple, including you and me is this:

1. CALL – God is always calling; we just need to listen carefully. Samuel heard God calling in the night and took a while to realise who it was. (1 Samuel 3. 2-18)
2. UNWORTHINESS – We are all unworthy for the task, but God makes us worthy.
3. SENDING – Each disciple is sent to do a piece of work in the Kingdom, however great or small.
4. EQUIPPING – Each disciple is formed and equipped for the task at hand.
5. CATCHING PEOPLE – More women, men and children are joined to the Body of Christ and become full and active members.

St Paul wrote, 'whenever I am weak, then I am strong...I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (2 Cor 12.10; Phil 4.13) What implications are here for the average Christian like you or me? St Matthew would want to say to us, "Go for it! The sky is the limit".