

# Third Sunday after Pentecost

## A PHYSICIAN FOR ALL SICKNESSES

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

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Analysis by Ron Starenko

9As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed Jesus. 10And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. 11When the Pharisees saw this, they said to the disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." 18While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." 19And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. 20Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, 21for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." 22Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." 23And instantly the woman was made well. 23When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. 25But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. 26And the report of this spread throughout that

district.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: The Sickness of Those Who Are Well**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *Who Needs A Physician?***

From day one we all imagine that we are “well,” which psychologists tell us is a defense against dread. Throughout our lives we answer the how-are-you-question with, “I’m fine!” Early on children respond to the parental what’s-wrong-question with a defiant, “Nuthin!” Macho males in denial refuse to go to the doctor. Except in the most dire straits, we would prefer to be physician-less. With a kind of self-righteous detachment, like the Pharisees, we look down on the derelicts of society, as if there was nothing wrong with us. So, our so-called “wellness” is really a sickness.

### **Step 2: Advance Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – *Who Needs Jesus?***

In our fear and dread of being found out as sick, we seek refuge unknowingly in our sickness. We are incapable of insight. We imagine in our hearts that we are A-okay. The Pharisee in us, seeing all these burdens-on-society gathering around Jesus, tries to look good to ourselves, to others, even to God. Who needs Jesus when we are doing fine on our own? Thank God I have my health, my religion, my goodness. I “take heart” (v. 22) that I am “righteous,” (v. 13) that I am not sick like others (cf. Luke 18:11-12). And so, in our Physician-less state we acknowledge only our “sacrifice” and our imagined “wellness,” but not “mercy,” the gift that heals. As a result we slip deeper into our sickness.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – *Sick to Death***

Soren Kierkegaard, in his treatise titled, “Sickness unto Death,” contends that beneath all of our denial is a dread, a

despair, to which we might cling to our eternal ruin rather than have the forgiveness and health that is in Jesus. By refusing to get well we succumb to a sickness that even in our dying we cannot escape; God lets us go where we choose and, defiantly, we lose ourselves and God, and hold on to our “wellness” at all costs. Finally, we are beyond healing, eternally Physician-less. How tragically sick is that?!

## **PROGNOSIS: The Wellness of Those Who Are Sick**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** – *The Physician We Need*

There would be no purpose, no benefit, in plumbing the depths of our need, uncovering our sicknesses of body, mind, and spirit, unless there is someone who can heal us. And who would know better the sickness of tax collectors and sinners, including self-righteous Pharisees, and the chronically ill and all of us who suffer the sickness of death than the One who takes on all of our sicknesses and suffers them away, our Lord Jesus Christ? He is the one whom David blessed, the God “who,” he proclaimed, “forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy” (Ps. 103:3-4). When Jesus ate with “tax collectors and sinners” (v. 11), when he released his healing power to the woman with the chronic disease (vv. 20-22), and when he took the dead girl by the hand and gave her life (v. 25), he was giving them and us a preview of how he would make us “well” (vv. 21-22), becoming sick for us on the cross and rising from death on Easter. There the Well-One, who was and remains life eternal, became sick to death in our stead, so that we who had no health in ourselves might receive his merciful gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Truly, he is the wounded healer, the Physician for all our sicknesses!

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution)** – *The Faith That*

## *Makes Us Well*

What is also astonishing about Jesus' healings that were then reported widely (v. 26) is that the sick become well by trusting in Jesus' mercy. When Jesus says to the woman, "Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well" (v. 22), he is assuring her that by her faith she crossed over from sickness to health, from being lost to being found, from being dead to being alive again. So sick are we that it will take the gift of the Holy Spirit, "the Lord and Giver of life," to gospel us into the healing body of Jesus Christ. Who else could bring Jesus into our sicknesses and by our faith make us as alive and whole and free as Jesus is? Like the tax collectors and sinners, the ill woman, the grieving father and the healed girl, we all gather around Jesus because of who he is and what he has done, and we live by his mercy and not by religion or medicine or positive thinking or self-serving morality. We are the sick who have become well, because we have a Physician for all our sicknesses.

## **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution)** – *Follow the Physician*

As a result, all those who have become well in the company of Jesus are no longer afraid of their sicknesses, nor even ashamed of the sick. Our new-found wellness points us away from our denials and self-delusions, even our despair, (common sicknesses all of them), to living life with a new calling. Matthew "got up" (v. 9) from his tax booth, walked away to join Jesus in the healing of others, which included writing this gospel. Sinners, – Pharisees, too, – were known to repent and believe the gospel, led also to move into life with a compassion and empathy for their fellow sick. The healed woman, we may presume, became a caregiver, a hospital volunteer perhaps. The leader of the synagogue quite likely found ways to organize community action for the benefit of children and teenagers, some of whom were troubled and confused. The young girl, awakened from her sleep

of death, “got up” (v. 25), we can guess, to follow Jesus as a therapist or a nurse. We too, as people who take heart, confessing our sicknesses, receiving Jesus’ healing today at his Table, will get up, like Jesus (v. 19) and find new ways to join the vast company of sinners and outcasts, the suffering, the despairing, the dying by connecting them to the Physician for all our sicknesses.