

Sunday 21 September 2025
The Feast of St Matthew

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Proverbs 3:13-18
NT: 2 Cor 4:1-6
Gp: Matthew: 9:9-13

Today, as we gather to celebrate the feast of St Matthew, we are invited into a story of profound grace—a story that begins at a tax collector’s booth and ends at the very heart of the Gospel. St Matthew, also known as Levi, began his life as someone on the margins, a tax collector for Rome, dismissed and distrusted by his own people for collaborating with the occupying forces. Yet it was into this unlikely life that Jesus spoke a word of invitation: “Follow me.” With those simple words, a miracle began—not just a change of occupation, but a transformation of heart, purpose, and destiny.

This feast invites us to ponder what it means to be called by Jesus, to be seen and loved in the midst of our ordinary routines and even our failures. St Matthew’s journey shows us that God’s call does not depend on our worthiness, but on the abundance of his mercy. In Matthew 9:9, we read: “As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax booth. ‘Follow me,’ he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.” It is a scene painted with extraordinary brevity, yet immense weight. There is no indication that Matthew hesitated, bargained, or asked for more time. He simply rose and followed—a decision that would alter the course of his life and echo through the centuries.

Sometimes we can be called by Jesus and offer up any number of excuses and put up barriers to avoid the call. Barriers may even be put up by others, but ultimately, Jesus calls us, is faithful and can overcome any number of barriers.

To understand the radical nature of Matthew’s call, we must remember who he was: a tax collector, a publican, someone regarded someone on the margins and a sinner. Tax collectors often grew very rich by exploiting their own communities, collecting more than was owed and keeping the difference. They were excluded from religious life, shunned in the synagogues, and considered beyond redemption by many.

Yet Jesus saw something different. He looked beyond Matthew’s occupation and reputation and saw a person capable of faithfulness, witness, and love. In this, we find hope: there is no one so lost or compromised that Jesus cannot call them. The transforming glance of Jesus is a theme throughout the Gospels—he sees not just what we are, but what, by his grace, we might become.

Matthew’s immediate response is both stirring and daunting. What must it have cost him to leave his security, his income, and the life he knew? The way of discipleship is not always easy. It often calls us away from comfort, certainty, and the patterns to which we have grown accustomed.

Jesus asks each of us, in countless ways, to “follow me.” Sometimes the invitation is dramatic—a clear sense of direction or purpose. More often, it comes in quiet, persistent nudges: a call to forgiveness, to generosity, to reconciliation, or to service. Like Matthew, we are invited to respond not with excuses or delay, but with courage and trust.

The story of Matthew also reminds us that discipleship is not about perfection, but about willingness. Jesus does not wait for us to be worthy; he calls us as we are, and by his grace, he makes us new.

After calling Matthew, Jesus sits at table with tax collectors and sinners, much to the annoyance of the Pharisees. “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” they ask. Jesus responds, “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 came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Matthew 9:12-13)

This table fellowship is a powerful sign: in God’s kingdom, there are no outsiders, only guests invited by grace. It is here, at the table of welcome, that the healing and reconciliation at the core of the Gospel are made visible.

St Matthew’s feast challenges us to ask: whom do we welcome at our own tables? Are there people we are tempted to write off, to avoid, or to judge? Jesus’s hospitality is radical—he draws in the ones the world rejects, and in doing so, calls us to do the same. Our churches and our lives are meant to reflect this wild, generous mercy.

The man who once sat at the tax booth would go on to proclaim the Good News to the world. Matthew preached the Gospel in Judea and then journeyed further, enduring hardship, exile, and ultimately martyrdom for the sake of Jesus. Through his Gospel, Matthew gives us some of the most beloved words of Jesus—the Beatitudes, the Great Commission, and the parables of mercy.

His life became a living testimony to the truth that Jesus can use anyone—however unlikely—to build the kingdom of God. Through Matthew, we are reminded that the journey of faith is not simply about our own salvation, but about becoming heralds of God’s love to others.

What might it look like to follow St Matthew’s example in our own lives?

- Openness to Change: Let us be willing to let go of old identities or habits that keep us from following Jesus more fully, trusting that God’s call always leads to greater life.
- Mercy in Action: Like Jesus, let us extend mercy to those whom others overlook or reject, building communities where all can find welcome and healing.
- Sharing the Good News: Let us not keep the story of Jesus’s love to ourselves, but, in all that we do, become examples of the transforming power of grace.
- Prayerful Discernment: Spend time in prayer, asking where Jesus is calling you to follow him more closely, and seek the courage to say ‘yes.’

As we honour St Matthew on this feast, let us give thanks for the mercy that called him and calls us still. May his story remind us that it is never too late, and we are never too far gone, to be embraced by Christ and sent out in his name.

Let us listen for the voice of Jesus, whispering through the noise of our everyday lives: “Follow me.” May we rise, as Matthew did, and discover in the adventure of discipleship a joy and freedom beyond anything we could have imagined.

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