

24 February 2019
Commemoration of St. Matthias, Apostle

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Rest Received; Rest Proclaimed”

Text: Matthew 11:25-30; Acts 1:15-26; Isaiah 66:1-2

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Sometime during the ten days between Jesus’ ascension into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, these words of Jesus became the words of Matthias - what he preached. For sometime during those ten days, the lot fell to him, and he was numbered with the eleven apostles, taking the place vacated by Judas.

And so along with Peter, James, and John, Andrew, Philip, and Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, Thaddeus, and Simon, Matthias preached this. These words that he had heard from Jesus’ lips, and saw Jesus fulfill. For that was one of the requirements for being placed into this office of apostle: he had to have accompanied the twelve all through Jesus’ public ministry, and be an eye witness of the resurrected Jesus. For apostles provided first hand testimony of what Jesus said, what Jesus did, and who Jesus was.

At least two fit those requirements, and the lot fell to him.

And so Matthias preached these words of Jesus, and how Jesus fulfilled them. For he had seen it himself, with his own eyes. How Jesus gave rest to people burdened by sin; notorious sinners like prostitutes and tax collectors. Jesus did not avoid them or reject them as the world did; consider them sub-human and not worth His time, effort, or attention - He forgave them. He gave them rest from their life of sin and their never-ending quest to be accepted. *He* accepted them. He loved them. He took their sin and bore it Himself, all the way to the cross. Yes, ***come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*** Matthias had seen Jesus do that very thing.

But Matthias had seen even more than that. He had seen people burdened by the requirements of the Pharisaical laws that went well above and beyond God’s Word, trying to fulfill them and so win God’s favor. He saw people who struggled under many and various diseases and sicknesses. People possessed and oppressed by demons and unclean spirits. He saw Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, officials and laborers - all coming to Jesus weary, tired, and broken. And Jesus gave them rest. He forgave them, healed them,

comforted them, fed them, freed them, loved them. We've been hearing about it all this Epiphany season. Matthias saw it with his own two eyes. And now he would be sent to preach it to others - to the world! - as an apostle.

And he had seen this too: Jesus, *gentle and lowly in heart*. Yes, Jesus spoke and preached with an authority never before seen or heard, but He was not arrogant or condescending. He was with the people and served everyone - even children. He spoke not to impress, but to be understood. When He brought the proud to their knees, it was so He could lift them up. When He took away, it was to provide what was better. Yes, *gentle and lowly in heart* - Matthias saw it in Jesus. Surely, there could be no better description of Jesus.

Matthias had seen it all. Learned it. He soaked it all in. Like a sponge. For three years he listened and observed. He'd been there from the beginning, perhaps a disciple of John the Baptist who then followed Jesus, once John pointed to Him and said: *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29)!

And then this too: the rest Jesus spoke of had been given to Matthias as well, not just to others. Matthias had been forgiven. Matthias had been fed. Matthias had been comforted and freed. Matthias had been given a new life! And so for Matthias, as for the others, it was personal. This good news they proclaimed wasn't just a teaching or a theory or a doctrine - it was the gift that had been given to them, and the gift they would now proclaim to others.

For now Matthias received the yoke of apostleship. But with this office, this position, he didn't get a fancy robe or pointy hat - being an apostle meant persecution, arrest, physical abuse, and finally a martyr's death. Jesus had forewarned them. If they did it to Him, they would do it to those who came after Him (John 15:18-16:4). So I think it reasonable that Matthias did *tremble* at this Word of God, as Isaiah said today, when the lot fell to him. This was no small thing he was entering upon.

But what happened to him *after* this day, *after* this episode, we are not told. Like many of the apostles, we know very little about him, where he went, and where and how he was martyred. Accounts vary. We don't even know what he did before this. Peter, James, and John were fishermen. Matthew was a tax collector. What did Matthias do?

We don't know. But from this day forward, he would forever be known as this: *the apostle that replaced Judas*. Judas, the betrayer, would be better known than he. Which is how it often is. Sins make the news more than the good things that happen. They're juicier.

And so it is still today. When the church makes the news today, sometimes it is for the good that is being done, but more often (and what stays in the news longer) are the sins and scandals, or how the church is out of step with the times. It's juicier. Everyone knows Judas, but mention Matthias . . . *Matthias who?*

But the Word of God does its work. Matthias and the others would preach it, would

proclaim Jesus and all that He said and did, but the Lord would do the work. The success wasn't up to them, or how well-known they became. The Lord would do the work through the Word they preached. And it wouldn't take a college degree to figure it out or understand it. The Father would *reveal it even to little children*. For, as Jesus said, this is *His gracious will*. That we all be His children and rest in the work of Jesus for us. His work that provided our forgiveness, accomplished our salvation, and gives life that not even death can end.

Come to Jesus, Matthias would preach. He would preach Jesus - God in the flesh, God on the cross, God risen from the tomb, God gentle and lowly, who came not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28), who came not to burden you but to lift your burdens, who came not to demand from you but to give you rest. And through that Word, many did find rest. Even Matthias. Even when he was martyred. For when you know the one who has defeated death and the grave, not even stones or cross or sword can separate you from Him and the *rest* He has *for your soul*.

And this preaching begun by Matthias and the others continues still today. **For you.** *For you* who are burdened and haunted by sins of the present and the past. *For you* who are heavy laden under the cares and troubles of this world. *For you* who are stretched thin in a world that never stops demanding and taking. *For you* who are tempted by satan to disbelieve our Lord and His Word and believe another truth, which is no truth at all. *For you* who are persecuted and shunned for your faith. *For you* try to do those things God would have you do, but fall far short. *For you* who maybe feel more like a Judas than a Matthias.

For you is this Word preached today: ***Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*** That word was for Judas too, but he would not believe it. He thought his sin too great and grievous to be forgiven. But no sin is too great or too grievous. For that is the Son of God for you on the cross. If it were a mere man, then yes, perhaps some sins would be too great. **But no sin is greater than the Son of God. And so no sin left unatoned for.** No sin still on you who believe in Him. He took them all, died for them, was buried with them, and then rose *without* them. Left them in the grave. They stayed dead but He didn't. Matthias saw it with his own two eyes, and so preached it. And through that Word many - including you here today, are receiving that rest - the forgiveness of your sins.

The rest given in **Holy Baptism**, where your sins die! Where you are buried and raised with Christ to a new life. No longer burdened or condemned by sin, but at rest in His forgiveness.

It is the rest given you in **Holy Absolution**, so that you no longer have to worry and be concerned about the Last Day and what will happen to you then. The word you hear now is the word you will hear then: that your sins are forgiven and you are a child of God.

It is the rest you receive in the **Gospel**, and the Gospel that is the Divine Service, when you hear that Jesus has come to serve you. That you don't have to win His favor - He comes to win you with His grace and favor. To provide what you need.

And it is the rest of His **Supper**. You know, my wife makes dinner for us almost every night - a gift I usually take for granted. *And I'm all proud the few times I actually prepare the meal for her!* But at this Table, it is your Saviour who feeds you, every week. Every week you come with your sins, your burdens, and your cares, and He says: *Sit. Rest. Let me serve you. Let me feed you.* And He does, and not just any meal, but the meal of His Body and Blood. And this feast, here, every week, is the feast and rest that will never end.

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Matthias heard those words and saw the Saviour who spoke them, and they made all the difference in the world. Today you hear them too, and through them the Father reveals His Son to you. That His forgiveness and rest be yours. No matter who you are or what you have done. Jesus is ***gentle***, kind, caring, for all in need; and He is ***lowly in heart*** - so no one too low that He can not, will not, lift up.

The lot fell to Matthias that day, but it is no lot or chance that has brought you here. The Lord has brought you here that you may know His Son. That His Word be preached, and that you hear and believe. That when you die, be it as a martyr like Matthias, in old age as John, or somewhere in between, you die as you lived - in Jesus. Confident that He who rose from the sleep of death will awaken you, too, to life.

So Arise! Shine! For your light has come (Isaiah 60:1)! Your Epiphany light today shining through Matthias and the twelve and their preaching of the Word, shining the light on the one who has done all things for you. The one who is your rest.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.