

7 June 2026  
Pentecost 2

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Perfectly Imperfect”

Text: Matthew 9:9-13; Romans 4:13-25; Hosea 5:15-6:6

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

**Follow me**, Jesus said to Matthew.

[Looking around] *Me?*

Yes, you! **Follow me**.

But I'm a tax collector! A Jew collecting taxes for the Romans! *Nobody* wants me.

I do. You're perfect. **Follow me**.

*Perfect?*

Yes, **for I came not to call the righteous, but sinners**. Outcasts. The ones nobody else wants, I do. **Follow me**.

But Lord! [Now the others there chiming in . . .]

*Yes?*

A tax collector? Really? I mean, a couple of smelly fishermen was bad enough! Now this? Him? And the others like Him?

*Isn't it great?*

No! You're making yourself unclean, hanging out with . . . you know.

*No, I don't know. With who?*

With . . . them!

*Exactly!*

What?

***Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.*** I will become sick, I'll take their sickness, that they may be well. I will become unclean, I will take their uncleanness, that they may be clean. That's what I came for.

But he doesn't deserve it!

Neither do you! Now, where were we? Oh, yes. Matthew, ***follow me.***

***And he rose and followed him.***

That same scene could have played out with Abraham, who was an idolater until God called him (Joshua 24:2). And with Paul, who was a persecutor of Jesus and the Church until God called him. And maybe with the prophet Hosea, too, though we don't know much about him. They were all perfect because they weren't. Because it all depends on God and His grace. Whoever they will be, whatever they will do, will be all by grace through faith.

*And what about you?* You fit this pattern too, don't you? *Perfectly imperfect.* For what is there about **you** that should disqualify you from being a Christian? Because I know there's something! Something in your past. Something you're struggling with right now. Something with your children or your parents. Something with your family or your marriage. Something you wish you wouldn't have done, or done differently. Regrets. Failures. Great and magnificent sins. *What is it for you?* What is that thing that if others knew about . . . would make you one of . . . you know, *them.*

Truth is, you *shouldn't* be here. Yet here you are. Sick with sin. Ashamed. Unclean. *Perfect for Jesus.*

For Jesus said to **you**: ***follow me.*** Actually, even more than that. For when you were baptized in His Name, He said: *you are mine.* Washed clean, forgiven, by grace through faith. Because whoever you are, whatever you are struggling with, you are exactly who Jesus came for.

God used the prophet Hosea to illustrate that for Him. As I said, we don't know hardly anything about Hosea before God called him to be a prophet. But after that, we know how God used him. And what God had Hosea do was marry a prostitute as *a living parable*; as a picture of Himself and the nation of Israel, who was being unfaithful to Him and prostituting themselves with false gods. And while God would strike Israel down, as we heard Hosea say today, He did so in love! *So*

that He could raise them up again. To bring them back from their unfaithfulness and rescue them. And Hosea explains how:

***After two days he will revive us;  
on the third day he will raise us up,  
that we may live before him.***

Two days and three days are *figurative* days for the nation. They will be struck down for just a short time, not forever. But they were also *literal* days . . . for the one who would do the raising. For the one who would take their sickness and uncleanness to make them well and clean. Who would take their shame and guilt and atone for it. The one who came to do that for Israel and all the nations and people of the world.

*Even for tax collectors.*

The one who was promised to Abraham when God called him from his idolatry for this very special purpose: *to be the father of the one to come; who would come and do this and be heir of the world.* Who would redeem *the world* - all people of all time, from Adam and Eve to even those today not yet born - to redeem us from our bondage to sin. That all **follow him**. From the least to the greatest. From the least sinner to the greatest sinner. From tax collectors and fishermen, to accountants, lawyers, and technology gurus. That on the third day, as Paul said, the one **who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification**, bring us to life together with Him in His resurrection from the dead. That by grace, **[our] faith be counted to [us] as righteousness.**

That's what happened for Matthew. He tells his own story in so few words that it's easy to miss its significance. But once we realize this, it also makes this account a perfect reading to begin this long, green Pentecost season with. To start this season by reminding us who we are and how we got here, and what we might be struggling with.

Struggling, because it's easy to look around and compare ourselves with others and maybe think: *I shouldn't be here!* And it's easy to look around and compare ourselves with others and maybe think: *They shouldn't be here!* But the truth is: *none of us should.* My issues may be different than your issues, my sins than your sins, my struggles than your struggles, but all of us are here by grace through faith. The perfectly *imperfect* made perfectly *perfect* in Jesus.

And so it is now to this house that Jesus has come **to recline at table with many tax collectors and sinners.** To be our great physician. To feed us and lift us up from our sins to sit at His table. And what makes us worthy to do so, the Catechism teaches us,

is that, like Matthew, we know we're unworthy! But Jesus said: ***follow Me!*** So follow we do, as we follow Him to the cross, and from the cross to the Table, where acknowledging our wretchedness and unworthiness, repenting of our sins, the Body and Blood of the cross are given to us to eat and drink and raise us in forgiveness to life.

Now, the Pharisees didn't like that! Jesus should be keeping better company! But that's not how Jesus sees it, *and thank God for that!* For then He wouldn't be here, with us and for us. And then we'd have to *earn* an invitation with our own goodness and worthiness . . . and I don't know about you, but that is one invitation I could never earn! And I don't think that would stop the grumbling either. In fact, I think it might even make it worse! For I think those who think they are righteous and have earned it would grumble at those they think unrighteous and unworthy, and *those* folks would grumble right back at those who think themselves superior!

So instead, since none of us are worthy, instead of grumbling at one another, we can join together in praise and thanksgiving to the one who made our presence here possible. To the one who said ***follow me***. To the one who died for us all and rose for us all and now feeds us all. Because Jesus wants us all - tax collectors, sinners, smelly fishermen, Pharisees, accountants, lawyers, teachers, technology gurus . . . even pastors! And He wants those not here yet - those still out there, some needing to be struck down, some needing to be lifted up, all needing to hear His call, and for the work of the Spirit through those words, ***follow me***.

### ***Follow me.***

Follow me to the cross, where I laid down my life for you, and you can lay down your life to be a blessing for others. Follow me to the Font, and remember your sin - all your unworthiness, ALL of it - is washed away and you are raised with Me to a new life. Follow me to the Altar, to be fed and strengthened in your struggle. Follow me to the Word, and hear how much I love you. And one day, finally, you will follow me is rising from the dead, to My heavenly Feast. Where Matthew will be. And not a few smelly fishermen. A few lawyers. *Maybe* even a few pastors! All one in Christ. All imperfect no more.

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.