

From the Holy Gospel: But when He heard it, He 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 came not to call the righteous, but sinners. [Matthew 9.12-13]

Today we observe the minor church festival known as “The Feast of St. Matthew, Apostle & Evangelist.” St. Matthew is familiar to you all as an author of one of the first four books in the New Testament, which we call “the Gospels.” Thus, St. Matthew is called “Evangelist,” because of the Greek name for the Gospel account, “The Evangel according to St. Matthew.”

In addition to being made an Evangelist, St. Matthew also is called by Christ to the role of an apostle. He is called out of that questionable business of tax collector. Back then, in New Testament times, the job of tax-collector was despised even more than today's job of I.R.S. agent, and with good reason. The tax-collector was a licensed cheat, authorized by the powers of Rome to collect as much as he could get

away with from his fellow Jewish citizens, and allowed by Rome to keep what he could as his pay. The result is that the New Testament tax collectors became rich.

St. Matthew is called by Christ in the midst of this, his trade, and Matthew leaves the tax business and follows Christ. Both as Evangelist, privileged to write one of the four Gospel accounts, and as Apostle, privileged to be part of the foundation of the New Testament Church, of which Christ is the chief cornerstone, St. Matthew is called to speak for God.

I.

St. Matthew, along with his fellow evangelists, Mark and Luke, and along with all his fellow apostles other than John, will be martyred for his work.

It is never easy to be the spokesman for God because the one thing that made the life of spokesman so tough for St. Matthew, the Apostle and Evangelist,

remains the one thing that hangs over the spokesmen for God today: the Message! The Word of God! That is what makes the proclaimers of the Word of God so dangerous. There has never been a time when sinful mankind is up to hearing and embracing the Word of God, not without the converting and sustaining work of the Holy Spirit.

Today, God has identified His spokesmen. You find them in several layers. First, there is the on-going voice – heard from the written Word of God – of the Evangelists and the Apostles who form the foundation of Christ's church. Then, there are those who are called in these present days to exercise the apostolic office in Christ's church, on his behalf, and for the welfare of His called and kept believers. Then, there is whole number of the baptized who both receive the Word of God as saved sinners and also carry forth

the Word of God as the body of Christ in mission.

II.

And here's the truth: It doesn't matter where you are in that order of things. The challenge of being spokesman for God remains the same. The challenge really isn't found in those who are to speak, nor in the reaction of those who are to hear. The challenge is in the activity of the Word of God that is spoken and heard. For the Word of God does today what it has always done: It kills, spiritually. It therefore causes resentment and resistance, because no one likes to face that which kills. The Word kills, and it is only after it kills that it also gives life.

No one likes the message of the Law, when it is spoken as full-strength Law, as God's intends. Full-strength Law leaves no sinner standing, as though the Law doesn't apply to some. Full-strength Law applies to us all, and it does so precisely so that we give up trying to justify our

Christian existence by our works. Full-strength Law is needed by all of us.

III.

So, here you find the answers as to why it is that when churches that are proclaiming the Word of God, including full-strength Law, being faithful as spokesmen for God, always find themselves facing resistance and even facing struggles to survive. Here is the reason. The Word of God is a threat to all who are not first killed and humbled by it. If the Word is NOT doing that, then the Word is NOT being spoken as God intends be spoken.

God's Word will always be the problem when it confronts sinful mankind. When our Lord Himself gets graphic in His terminology about how His followers will eat His flesh and drink His blood, many forsake Him. His numbers drop drastically, so much so that it shocked His disciples.

The Word of God is the challenge, because the Word of God first must kill

before it brings new life; whether from the mouth or pastor or people, whether speaking to a crowd or a neighbor, the Law of God must precede the Gospel.

The Word of God kills precisely in order to bring new life. That new life is created and sustains by Gospel, which comforts repentant, humble sinners, declaring that you are Christ's, now and forever. God's love for you has brought you through spiritual death to spiritual life. God's promise to you is that He will always continue to do this to you and for you.

With this promise, you can withstand all that life might throw at you, for He is with you, and life only gets better – life only gets to be what it is designed to be– after the dying, and in the rising to new life. This rising now is bit by bit, moment by moment, for that is the foretaste, the this Christian life foretaste of the life yet to come, the life that never ends.