

# Collect, Readings and Reflection for 21 September 2025, Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

## **Collect** *(the Church's prayer for today):*

O Almighty God,  
whose blessed Son called Matthew the tax collector  
to be an apostle and evangelist:  
give us grace to forsake the selfish pursuit of gain and the possessive love of riches  
that we may follow in the way of your Son Jesus Christ,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

## **Readings: Proverbs 3:13-18; Matthew 9:9-13**

*Today's reflection is by Reader, Pete Gillions*

### **Jesus calls Matthew**

Seeing the news on television makes you think that things seem to be going from bad to worse. In just thirty minutes most of the news items mentioned can make you feel despairing. Here is just a few of them.

Firstly there's the increasing division in society. People appear to be more polarised and many seem to prefer to shout at each other rather than genuinely discuss differences. Secondly look at the political leadership. There is a big difference between what ordinary people want and what government delivers. Immigration being a case in point. But you could add hospital waiting lists and crumbling public services to the list. Many see government as being out of touch with the public. Thirdly look at what is happening in the world. In Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and many, many more places wars are raging and innocent lives being taken to satisfy the goals of evil leaders. Military oppression is prevalent on so many places and the international community appear powerless. Finally, while we are about it let's not forget the Church - for many its largely irrelevant but even for those who have faith the again the leadership appear divided on so many issues and out of touch. And people are well aware of past failings that have been covered up.

But don't despair because of course there is a remedy to the daily dose of doom. It is to be found in a single person, that person of course is Jesus. How so? Social division, lack of trust in political and religious leaders, and military oppression accurately describes the first century Israel. By seeing how Jesus related to that world we can learn how to respond the daily dose of doom with a faith filled hope. So for a moment let us step into that world.

Overshadowing everything in Israel was the military oppression of Rome. Living under Roman rule had some benefits as you were protected by the might of Rome against other invaders. But the Pax Romana – the peace that gave – came at a cost. The cost was you lived in fear, fear of a terrifying and tortuous public death, the fear of the cross. The historian Tom Holland studied the Romans for years. But it was only when he visited an area in Iraq that had formerly been occupied by the ISIS that the real terror of crucifixion hit him. He said it is only when you breathe in the dust of a town where people had actually been crucified that you realise how terrifyingly awful crucifixion was. In first century Israel that was the dust people breathed each day. They lived in fear of the cross.

Society in Israel was deeply polarised about how they should respond. Even the religious folk were divided. The first religious group, the Sadducees, you could describe as politically astute realists. They saw cooperation with Roman rule would be the best way forward. Working with the Roman ruler Herod the Temple complex was hugely improved. Although Herod did take the precaution of sitting a Roman garrison right on the corner just in case. However to most people they were seen to be deeply corrupt, more interested in helping themselves than in ordinary people. Religious in name only. The second religious group were the Pharisees, the evangelicals of the day. They knew not only the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, but they tried to live work out what the laws meant in daily lives and obedience to them. Some Pharisees believed that if all of Israel could successfully keep the Mosaic Law perfectly for a single day, God would send the Messiah to save Israel. So you can see why they had a bit of an attitude towards Jews who were not observant. The third religious group in this tiny country were the Essenes, the religious extremists. They lived outside mainstream society. Probably the closest we have is people who live in monasteries. John the Baptist was probably one of them. Again they thought that purity of life and religious observance would see the might of Rome defeated. So one faith and three polarised groups who, did not see eye to eye with each other.

Unsurprisingly some in Israel thought that a more direct resistance to Roman rules was what was needed. These were called the Zealots, the equivalent of the French resistance in the war. They were regarded by Rome as a terrorist group. They were more than willing to murder to achieve their aims. They would endorse assassination of opponents. However the Roman response would often be violent collective punishment against the local population. So they were not that popular with the locals. Imagine living in that society as an ordinary citizen who just wanted to get by. For most people that meant simply keeping your head down, keeping out of trouble and trying to make a living - a living that for most would be just above the bread line. You were regarded by all the religious groups as simply "Sinners". Life was hard and doom laden.

Let's not forget the Romans who need to see a return from the countries they occupy. To do that they simply use local people to collect taxes on their behalf. These collaborators were told by Rome how much they had to raise each year and had the

might of Rome behind them if payment was not made. It was open to abuse and whilst tax collectors were generally regarded as the worst of the worst for selling out to Rome. You made money but not friends. Matthew was such a man. So you can imagine the shock when Jesus deliberately and publicly asks him to *“Follow me”*. Not only that but then goes to openly eat with him alongside other tax collector and outcasts. They say you can tell a lot about a person by the company they keep and here we see Jesus mixing with one of the most despised people in society. The one thing that united all the various groups was their shared hatred of tax collectors. The passage continues

*“And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”* To them choosing to be with a tax collector was unthinkable. Why was Jesus doing this. When Jesus heard their question, he said to the Pharisees, *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”* Perhaps the start to think that at least Jesus was in agreement with them? That tax collectors and sinners were the ones most in need of help. But that was not the point Jesus was making and we see that by what he says next.

Jesus quotes from an Old Testament prophet Hosea and asks them to *“Go and learn what this means: “ ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’* The pharisees would immediately see the point, Hosea was speaking of God’s love for Israel despite all of Israel’s failings. And when Jesus says again that He came *“not to call the righteous, but sinners.”* He is asking a simple question of them – Has Israel really changed from when Hosea was around? - Are you really as righteous before God as you think you are?

Jesus lived in as divided and doom laden society as we are in today. And his response was a simple one. He told people to follow him and that by following Him they would find true purpose and hope. Last week Jo described the parables of Jesus as being like God giving presents to us, something we can open up and delight in. But the greater gift God gave was Jesus himself. Jesus who did the unthinkable and voluntarily embraced the horror of death on the cross. By doing so He defeated death itself by His resurrection, and bought to Matthew and the first disciples true hope instead of despair, life instead of death

Jesus gives the same invitation to each of us as He gave to Matthew, *“Follow me”*. And perhaps it is only those who recognise their need who can hear that call because *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.”* In closing I would like to share something of what the call to *“Follow me”* might mean for each of us. Maybe the first step is to realise that just like with Matthew Jesus call to follow comes to us right where we are. We don't need to try to sort ourselves out first. Despite the mess in our lives yet we are loved by God and called to come to Jesus to be made well. The first step in restoring the broken world is to be ourselves restored into as right relationship with God.

In the prayer Jesus taught his disciples there is the longing that God’s will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Bringing something of the peace and joy and hope of heaven to earth. One remarkable way to do so starts at an individual level as we

respond to God's call. But that restoration is demonstrated by creating a community that expresses that love, the Church. Jesus never asks his followers to agree but he does command us to love one another despite everything. That is what shows the world we are His disciples

That call to each of us continues. It comes to us as we share the bread and wine remembering who we truly are and all Jesus has done for us. Remembering his death on the cross reminds us of God's great love to each and to all, His mighty resurrection shows that even death cannot separate us from God's love and His promise to come again says that one day all things will be reconciled and peace will flow like a river and righteousness like a ever flowing stream.

When Matthew responded to Jesus call he could not imagine what that might mean. It is something many of us struggle with, to know what God is calling us to. Perhaps one way is to 'kick the ball that is in front of us'. For example when we were presented with the request to help provide a space for the food pantry we together realised that was what was being asked of us. It is important to be outward looking. At the moment we are asking God to lead us in decisions about how to make best use of the building we have inherited so we can.

Although the outlook on the news is often bleak. we have been given the Good News – Christ has died – Christ has Risen – Christ will come again. As we rejoice in this we carry a hope that goes beyond the headlines. One day all things will be restored. And we are given a reminder that we are called to help bring something of heaven to earth. May God lift our eyes to the Risen Christ to see His perspective on the world we live in. As C.S. Lewis "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else

Amen

Lord God. We come to you this morning once again as those who need the healing grace of God. As we receive your grace, lead us to bring something of heaven to earth here in Horsforth. Amen

