

### **Matthew 9:9-13**

*“As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as he sat at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” 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.”*

Who voted this past Tuesday? Who exercised their right to vote? I was sitting in a restaurant this week reading and listening to people, and what I heard was very disturbing. I heard people giving excuses why they didn't vote in the last presidential election. Some because the lines were too long; others said they didn't vote because it really didn't matter. Some said they didn't vote because they had other things to do.

For those who did not vote then or this week ... You ought to be ashamed of yourselves! Men and women, around this country gave and are giving their lives so you could have the right to vote. The graves of thousands of men and women line cemeteries around this country, and you couldn't stand in your line for an hour or so. Everyone who did not vote ought to be ashamed of themselves. Aren't you glad those men and women who wear or wore our country's uniform didn't say, "I don't have time to go, I'm too busy?"

Tomorrow is Veteran's Day, the one day we set aside to honor those men and women who stood in the gap for each of us; they fought for us to have the rights; rights we have no problem claiming as long as they suit us and don't inconvenience us. But even how we treat our veterans has become a travesty and we should all be ashamed of ourselves.

Congress passed a law a number of years ago that seems to fly under the radar. This law entitles any U.S. veteran to have two uniformed military personal present at their funeral to fold and present a flag to their family, and to have "Taps" played on a bugle at the end of the service. Who could argue with such simple honors? But sadly there is a problem. There are very few bugle players around these days, and many of the ones who play don't have the time. This lack of brass musicians has caused a Congressional mandate, this federal law was altered: veterans still have the right to "Taps" at their funeral, but "Taps" can now be played on a CD player in lieu of a bugle during their funeral.

In order to keep the ceremony a little more stately, a whole new "instrument" has been invented. This "instrument" looks like a bugle, but instead of brass keys and an open end, this "bugle" is designed around a CD

player. When the “bugler” hits the “play” button on this phony bugle, a red and green light comes on. The phony “bugler” then has five seconds to get the “bugle” up to his or her lips before the recording starts to play.

Not surprisingly, this fake “bugler” faces away from the mourners, so no one can see the flashing lights displaying on the side of the bell on the fake instrument. In our culture, even when we try to do something sensitive and notable, we are all about appearance.

We substitute style for substance over and over again. We have done this compromising so much that many today many even prefer the fakeness of these false notes, to the real performance of a fallible, fragile human being. After all, that way we don't have to worry about a wrong note or God forbid emotion by the bugler who is offering a genuine final tribute to someone who if for anything else they earned the right.

When Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, He did not call them to undergo some intensive training course, or to attend a theological seminary. Jesus called His disciples to immediate active practice.

Jesus wasn't calling the qualified to follow Him, because He had every intention of qualifying the called. Jesus wanted His disciples with all their human flaws and imperfections; He wanted them just as they were.

As Jesus called His disciples to follow Him, He healed those in need, He taught those who listened, and He always asked for some active response. Matthew – and before him Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John – they were all asked to make a move in order to accept their new status as disciples. They got up. They left their established routines. They stepped out onto a new road all without being an expert and/or perfect in anything.

With Jesus starting His church this way, and we all claim to read and believe the Scriptures, somebody explain to me how the church of today has become this “Sunday Spa” for the spiritually elite? Where did this “Jacuzzi Jesus” come from? Where and when did we decide that our faith, our discipleship journey, is nothing more than a weekly “sit and soak” break in some room we claim to be spiritual because we put some fake cross on the top?

French leader General Charles De Gaulle once stated, “Church is the only place you could go where somebody talks, and you don’t have to say anything back.” The problem with De Gaulle’s statement of the church of the 50’s and 60’s is it still rings true today. In too many churches “discipleship” is defined as “attendance,” not participation. Woody Allen is noted for saying “90 percent of life is just showing up.” That is NOT the case for discipleship. We have not been called just to “show up.” We have been called to “Follow Him,” we have all been called to “participate” in Jesus’ life, and to continue His story. My question to everyone this morning is “What’s Your Excuse?”

“What’s Your Excuse,” for not serving? “What’s Your Excuse,” for settling for the phoniness we call worship? Seems too many today have become satisfied with the modern church. The modern church is more like a shopping mall or civic center where you have to do nothing but come, sit and be entertained; involvement no longer required. People walked for days to find Jesus and hear His Sermon on the Mount, today longer than an hour or hour and fifteen minutes and people are in an uproar with nothing but complaints. People sat and listened to Jesus’ teachings not concerned about

when, where, or what they were going to eat, today people even stay home from worship of God to cook eleven different items to appease everyone in the family down to the dog. What's your excuse?

One of my favorite moments in the book "The Shack" is this great comparison between expectancy and expectation. In a chapter called, "Verbs and other freedoms," author William Young talks about institutions of marriage, of religion, politics and economics. His theory is that our hope for the future in each one of these areas is in changing our speech from stagnant nouns to dramatic verbs. Expectancy is alive and active. Expectation is passive.

Jesus taught His disciples to live with expectancy, not expectation; He called His disciples to be agents of action from the moment they were called. If the church is to be the Body of Christ alive, we as disciples are called to serve with the same energies and passion, that same dramatic engagements and expectancy. The Body of Christ "alive" depends upon our activity, our participation, in order to remain vital and alive.

We want to hear only perfect singing, so many use the excuse I can't sing and don't sing when the truth is they won't sing. Many say I can't teach because I don't know enough, when the truth is they won't teach. Many say they don't have the time to work with the children and/or youth when the truth is they won't give the time. The truth is we do anything we really want to do; it's just that doing it for God is not a priority. Think about this, we have changed the church to accommodate what we want to do, instead of what God wants. We can come up with more excuses not to follow Jesus and serve God, but if it's something we want we have no trouble getting up early and staying late. When was God taken out of the front seats of our lives and put into the back seats? More than that when did we put Him into the trunk?

God today is only important when we need Him; need Him to handle something we created and/or have to get out of; otherwise we don't have time for Him. God has been replaced with imitations and counterfeits. We have replaced God or allowed Him to be replaced with entertainment and self-help programs. It seems today as long as we are entertained and told sweet stories and our egos are stroked we're happy happy happy.

We should all be thankful these men and women who wore and/or wear the uniform do not say "I don't have the time." These men and women who serve not only give their time for us, some and many live under some very adverse conditions.

Today if one person in the family doesn't feel good the whole family stays home. What has happened to us? What have we created and/or allowed to happen to God's church? Why have we settled for all these substitutes and imitations? What's your excuse?

It's time to stop offering and/or accepting some altered "canned" version of the gospel to the world. It's time to stop following red and green lights which we won't or can't let others see like the fake bugler, and it's time to tune our lives to the real Jesus Christ. We've been singing the praises of those red and green lights for far too long. It's time to start singing the praises of the Light of the World, the First and Last Light. It's time to stop caring about how we look and/or how we sound, or how long it lasts and start caring about real substance, it's time we start caring about reality and truth, it's time we put God back where He belongs in our lives... 1<sup>st</sup>!

It's time to learn how to play God's song, even when our notes are wrong and faltering and sometimes even flat. It's time to learn how to play the instrument God gave us; it's time to blow our own bugle with its own unique sound and spirit.

If you can't give God your best and your all and follow Jesus, "What's Your Excuse?" And before you answer that question, remember who you're giving your excuses too, and it's not me!