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**What Signs Do People See at St. Paul?**

January 29, 2023

Whether they know it or not, every church communicates specific ‘signs’ to the people who walk through their doors. This week we will take a look at the signs we need to communicate at St. Paul.

Those signs include:

Come as you are

You matter to God

Slow, children at play

Grace happens

**INTRODUCTION:**

Good or bad, what are some ‘signs’ that you have seen communicated through other church experiences? (Please do not name the church)

St. Paul serious about making the ‘signs’ above and others a reality because these are things that Jesus is serious about. One of the best examples of this is when Jesus called Matthew to follow Him in Matthew 9:9-13.

Matthew 9:9-13 NLT As Jesus was walking along, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow Me and be My disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed Him. 10 Later, Matthew invited Jesus and His disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. 11 But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked His disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with such scum? " 12 When Jesus heard this, He said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do." 13 Then He added, "Now go and learn the meaning of this Scripture: 'I want you to show mercy, not offer sacrifices.' For I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

**Background**

Jesus was a well-known traveling teacher and rabbi. It was normal for rabbis to have students or disciples who would follow and travel with them to learn from the rabbis and carry on their teaching to the coming generations.

In the first century, it would have been exceedingly surprising that a renowned rabbi would have called a tax collector to follow him. The Jewish people did not like tax collectors. They were considers sellouts to the Roman government. Tax collectors were infamous for charging more than required in taxes and keeping the rest for themselves.

Re-read Matthew 9:9

Remember the time you were invited to follow Jesus? What was it about following Jesus that was intriguing? What do you think was going through Matthew’s head when Jesus invited him to follow Him?

It is evident that Jesus asked Matthew to come as you are when He invited Matthew to follow Him. How do you think that impacted Matthew?

Why is it so important that we come as we are when we begin to follow Jesus?

Re-read Matthew 9:10

Eating with people is one of the greatest ways to show them that they matter to you. What does Jesus eating with the tax collectors and ‘sinners’ tell us about how God views those people? Do you believe you matter to God? Why or why not?

You will always matter to God. There is nothing you could ever do to make God love you less. How does knowing that truth about His love change your view of God? How does the behavior in your life change as a result of intersecting with this love?

Read Matthew 19:13-15

Matthew 19:13-15 NLT One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so He could lay His hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering Him. 14 But Jesus said, "Let the children come to Me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children." 15 And He placed His hands on their heads and blessed them before He left.

In this passage, Jesus has an interaction with children attempting to come to Him, but Jesus’ disciples wouldn’t allow it. Jesus makes it clear that all people are welcome to come to Him, even the children. What do you think about Jesus’ declaration to His disciples about children?

Children are a symbol of vulnerability and helplessness. Jesus is clear that these are the type of people He welcomes into His Kingdom. How are you vulnerable and helpless in your life? What does God want to do about your vulnerability and helplessness?

If God is all about helping the helpless, then it would only make sense for God’s people to be doing the same thing. How have you helped the vulnerable and helpless recently?

Re-read Matthew 9:11-13

Back in the story of Matthew’s calling, the religious people are getting mad. The religious leaders didn’t like the idea of spending time with people who weren’t worthy. How does Jesus spending time with dirty ‘sinners’ affect you?

Jesus’ response reveals why He came to earth. If you had to put yourself somewhere on a spectrum between healthy and sick, where would you identify yourself? Why?

How does your relationship with Jesus change where you find yourself on the spectrum between healthy and sick?

If Jesus’ reason for coming to earth was for the sick, then what implication does that have for the church? When have you seen ‘grace happen’ at St. Paul?

**WALKING WITH JESUS**

This week plan a party. Plan to invite people who are far from God like Jesus did with Matthew and his friends. Simply invite them into your home and have a meal together. You don’t have to talk about anything ‘churchy’ or baptize everyone in the group before the nights over. All you have to do is interact with people who are far from God like Jesus did.

Here are a few suggestions:

Plan a Super Bowl party and invite people who are far from God. Have a “happy hour” with people from work. Obviously the point of this is not to overindulge, but to spend some time with people in an environment where Jesus would have spent time. (For ladies) Have a spa night with a relaxing atmosphere. Keep it informal, relaxed, and spend time listening to the cares and concerns of the women you invite.