

Grace and Peace from God our Father and Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Matthew, this morning we have listed to another St. Matthew tell us Jesus' story. That Saint Matthew – as opposed to our newest saint Matthew – lives in a liminal moment – at the threshold between who and what the people of God had been. The people of God had been living under the law and waiting for the messiah to usher in a new age, but that had not happened. Instead, the Romans had laid waste their city, their nation, their temple. Who and what they would be – following the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the obliteration of the temple – remained to be seen.

What they thought was going to happen clearly hadn't happened. God had not done what they expected or anticipated God would do. And now, after the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple and the dispersion of the Jewish people, I dare say they didn't expect that their previous visions of God coming down and fixing everything once and for all was likely.

How in the world would they ever meet God now that the temple had been thrown down by the Romans stone by stone and pushed off the temple mound, the high priestly families scattered, and the sacred vessels taken as booty of war? God had not swooped down and taken the people up of Israel in one sweeping intervention.

“What now? How in the world would they encounter the living God without temple, priests, precious and holy things?”

Today it's not much different. There are those who believe that they are bringing about God's will by legislating morality – making laws that force everyone into living as *“they think”* God intends; or those who believe they can manipulate Jesus into returning a second time by promoting a pro-Israel agenda and, and thus ensuring that the first step – the Jewish people in Israel – will set the stage for Jesus' second coming.

I dare say that Jesus and St. Matthew would tell us all today what He intends for the Jewish and Gentile Christians in his audience 2000 years ago: *“So, life has not gone as you expected and God has not sided with you over your adversaries; just because God has not met you on your terms, does not mean that you cannot still meet God on God's terms.”*

Besides, could you really trust or believe in a god who does what we want or expect? Just look around, the world is in the sorry state it's in because we continue to do things as we want them to be, as we expect they should be. Do we really want a god who shares our instincts? I certainly do not. No.

Thankfully, God continues to say what God has always said since that first day we decided to take matters into our own hands: *“It is not My place to listen to and trust you. It is your place to listen to and trust Me. You can go about your business all you want, and you will not find me. But if you go about my business, you will know that I am there with you.”*

We are not even a chapter away from the place in Matthew 25 where Jesus tells His *“parable of the last judgment”* where He drives more

the point – “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”

Jesus Himself tells us how we will meet the Lord. Not in the air, **not in a cataclysmic coming of God or day of judgment**, not in deep darkness and foreboding. But **in our neighbor, in the stranger, in the needy on our midst** – through compassion, kindness, gentleness, mercy.

But we may feel compelled to point to where Jesus says a man in the field and the woman grinding meal will be snatched up from the presence of their fellows. These verses have historically been interpreted to provide evidence that Jesus foresaw the rapture because He says one worker in the field is “taken” and one left, and one woman grinding meal will be “taken” and the other left. **Except that’s not what the Greek really says.** The Greek word that word rendered as “taken” (*paralambanomai*) means neither “to be snatched up”, “to go up” or “to meet”, but simply “to invite someone to go along with” – as in “allow someone to follow you.”

It’s precisely the word used earlier at the Transfiguration when “Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John.” He did not “take them,” as in snatch them up, rather **He selected these three and allowed them to follow Him up the mountain.** It’s exactly **the same word Jesus uses in Matthew 18** when He describes what we should do if we confront our brother or sister with their sin against us and they do not listen; **we are to “bring one or two others with you.”**

It is ***not a special or a magical word*** about “floating up into the air”, “being snatched up” or “being separated from others.” It is much more like the fishermen or tax collector answering Jesus' invitation to ***“follow me”*** – “come along with me – let's walk down the road together.” God is present with us where the world needs God's people to be, where no one else is willing to go.

In my mind, it is more likely the man in the field and the woman grinding meal being “taken” are those who leave their work – the demands of everyday life – to hear, heed and answer God's call to show love, mercy and compassion towards others.

A few minutes ago through the water and the Word of Holy Baptism, Matthew Lustig became part of the household of God. Matthew, You did not receive a golden ticket, but an invitation to hear, heed and answer Jesus' invitation to love people you don't even know. We already know what that looks like, because your mother, Erica, chose to love children who needed the love, mercy and compassion of someone who would make you hers forever. You are her child and our brother now.

And I promise you, whenever you live in and live out that same selfless love your mother has poured out for you towards people you don't have to love, you will be hearing, heeding and following Jesus' invitation: “Follow Me.” And you will know that God is alive in the world and in your life. That is our hope and prayer for you, for Harmony and for one another.

So, Matthew and Harmony – and the rest of you as well, keep your eyes and hearts open because we do not know when the Lord will extend an invitation to follow his love to care for someone we may not even know. But be ready. Look at how well it has turned out for your mother.

AMEN !!!