

St. Matthew's Day Meditation
"Follow Me"
The Rev. Christopher Rogers
September 20, 2026

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Therefore we intend to establish a school for the Lord's service. In drawing up its regulations, we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. The good of all concerned, however, may prompt us to a little strictness in order to amend faults and to safeguard love. Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.

Never swerving from his instructions, then, but faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom. Amen.

This is the end of the prologue which St Benedict wrote to the Rule for his monks in the early sixth century.

Life in a sixth century monastery would no doubt have seemed harsh to us, and yet Benedict's rule is full of practical, reasonable, even gentle, advice, much of which is still followed today.

For example, on making amends for faults immediately, and on reconciliation;

on how the psalms were divided up over the course of a week for the pattern of daily prayer;

on welcoming guests as Christ himself, for '*I was a stranger and you welcomed me.*'

It seems, looking back over my sermons for St Matthew's Day, at least over the last couple of years, that we have been discerning our strategy forever, but it is almost ready, I promise, and once I've slimmed it down a bit, should I hope be approved at this week's vestry meeting.

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Much of our strategy is trying to think, as Benedict did, about what living out our faith looks like for us – what its particular expression in our lives might be, in our place and circumstances.

As you will know by now, the headline vision is '*Reaching In, Reaching Out and Reaching Up*': Reaching In: digging deeper spiritually and as a community; Reaching Out to our neighbors and to those in need; and Reaching Up to God in our shared worship.

All should be integrated, and are interconnected parts of the Christian life, but I have to say, after being here for three years now, that what stands out to me about our life as a community here at St Matthew's is the real hunger for formation as Christians, for going deeper in our relationship with God.

There is something of a paradox in living the Christian life. A couple of years ago I preached about the sweetness of it, of simply dwelling with God.

And indeed, Jesus does, immediately after calling Matthew from his tax booth, invite him to recline with him in a meal. '*I desire mercy, not sacrifice.*'

It is at the same time however true that it can be long, hard work: it requires faithfulness in your prayers and in your service, in good times and bad, when you feel like it and when you don't.

This is why Benedict saw the need for his '*school for the Lord's service.*'

Both visions are true. Matthew may have reclined with Jesus and with those tax collectors and sinners who were in need of a physician; yet he is also thought to have died a martyr's death.

Faithfulness is not easy.

We do not *earn* the sweetness and deep satisfaction that often follows – that is given to us as free gift.

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But we can create the conditions and habits which enable our whole life to become one of prayer, so that it infuses everything – our family life, our work, Monday to Friday, our play - in order to be more open to God, and to find God, in all that we do.

To put it another way, we can tune our hearts so that they are in harmony with God; or so that the song of God which is already in each of us, because God made us, can sing out.

Our readings for today give some sense of what the life of faith might involve:

From Proverbs, *'Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you.'*

'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.'

Paul in his Second Letter to Timothy: *'continue in what you have learned and firmly believed'*, knowing that scripture is useful *'for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.'*

There is a real sense of practicality here.

Another paradox about the Christian life, which it has in common with many other religions, is that it takes a lot of work to get to the kind of *simplicity* which we are aiming for – to become truly childlike.

I have certainly found that in my rhythm of daily prayer – it seemed like such a burden when I began, so wordy; and yet now I feel as though I inhabit it, swimming in the psalms, breathing them as the air around me, at least when it's at its best.

So this is both hard work and joyful, beautiful work; and it is certainly far easier done together. Which is why so much of our strategy is about finding as many ways as possible to do this work together, in courses, in small groups, listening together, to each other and to God; serving one another and the wider community, together. Even personal silent prayer is easier when you can share your experiences with others.

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And this is why it is also such a great joy that Loyola Spirituality Center have chosen to make St Matthew's their permanent home, and a number of their spiritual directors are with us this morning, and will be available to talk to over coffee.

The job of a spiritual director is to help a person reflect on their prayer and on their relationship with God. All priests are expected to have them, but it is also something for anyone – in the same way that you might have a therapist for your mental health, why not try having someone to accompany you in your spiritual life?

I hope as well as some people engaging in spiritual direction, whether individually or in groups, your presence with us might help us in other ways to go deeper spiritually.



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I have included this postcard of one of my favourite paintings again this year, having preached on it on my first Sunday here three years ago, because our patronal festival is not just a great chance for us to think about who we are as a church and who we are being called to be together, but for *each* of us to see the Jesus who is calling Matthew, and us, and to ask what that calling might look like for us.

I believe that pretty much every person who chooses to come to church in this day and age comes because, deep down, they – you, we – want transformation.

Caravaggio shows us a Jesus who is calling us – recreating us, with the hand of God.

Each day, we have the choice to live for ourself, or to wake up to the recreation which Jesus is calling us to in living for Him and for others; resurrection into His life, in other words.

It is hard work to follow, but we are in this together – in our own school of love here at St Matthew's.

'Follow me', Jesus says.

Will you get up, day by day, and do the work of re-tuning your heart to God's song, which is longing to make your whole being sing?

I know I can't do that work on my own, but today as we celebrate our patron saint and ask for his prayers, I rejoice that I can walk with all of you as we seek to follow Saint Matthew, in getting up and following the Jesus who would daily recreate us as the people and community we are made to be.

In the name of the same Jesus Christ, I say Amen.