

**21<sup>st</sup> September 2025, Matins.**

**St Maththew**

**Mother Emma**

This week the Church remembers St Matthew, one of the twelve apostles AND the attributed writer of one of the four Gospels. Although there has, of course, been some debate as to whether Matthew the apostle himself was actually the writer of the Gospel of Matthew as we know it today, many people still believe that his work or at least his memories do form the basis of the Gospel.

If so, Matthew was in a unique position, as an eyewitness to Jesus' life, ministry and teaching; his arrest, Resurrection and Ascension, to pass on to others the miraculous story in which he himself had been privileged to share. Perhaps he could never have imagined that his memories of the time he shared with Jesus would survive across the centuries, translated into countless languages in countries he never knew existed, chanted, read aloud or studied in silence, week by week and day by day in Christian communities all over the world. And yet it is only Matthew's Gospel which records the final words of Christ's earthly existence as follows: "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...*" Clearly, these were the words which struck home for Matthew, and how could HE have done this more effectively than in recording them for generations to come?

The early Church believed that Matthew had done more than record this saying – he too had gone out to make disciples of the nations, preaching and teaching across the countries of North Africa and the Middle East. It has been suggested, although this may be only the stuff of legend, that Matthew himself was killed by a soldier with a lance in Ethiopia, where he had been seen to rebuke the king, as he tried to evangelise him. But what led Matthew to the wholehearted conviction, trust and loyalty which led him to follow Jesus through life, and share his message after his death?

Matthew was a Jew, presumably a Galilean, as were most of the disciples, but he was a Jew who was despised for his work as a tax-collector, someone who had collaborated with the Romans and with their puppet king, Herod Antipas, by collecting taxes for them from his own people. It was also widely believed that your average tax-collector was not above siphoning off a portion of the money collected into his own pocket. We often hear in the Gospels, the phrase "*tax-collectors and sinners*", which shows clearly how the tax-collectors were regarded by society, lumped in with those who disobeyed religious law. But Jesus called to Matthew, as he did to the rich young man in today's reading from Matthew's Gospel: "*Follow me.*"

How must Matthew have felt, accustomed to being despised as a traitor to his people, as one to be described in the same breath as religious sinners, when he found himself being chosen by a religious teacher as one of his personal followers? In those simple words, "*Follow me!*", Jesus is holding out to Matthew not only the hand of friendship, but a sense of trust and confidence, a recognition of potential gifts, and most of all, forgiveness for whatever lay on his conscience.

Perhaps in that moment, he recognised that the wealth he craved, even to the extent of turning to dishonesty and exploiting his own people, is nothing compared with godly wisdom and understanding, as we heard in our reading from Proverbs.

Many of us will have experienced the sense of warmth, relief and joy when someone tell us that it is all all right – that in spite of mistakes we have made, or wrong decisions we may have taken, others are still prepared to trust us, and to entrust us with tasks they consider important. Perhaps it is not surprising that Matthew, who had always felt himself to be on the outside, beneath people's contempt, responded to this call with the whole of his being – following Jesus with devotion, recording every conversation which had touched him, and finally facing the risk of death himself, in order to enable others to share this sense of being forgiven and accepted.

The very last words of his Gospel, *“Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”*, were clearly for him, the poignant message of Jesus' love, forgiveness and support, which he urgently wanted to communicate to others.

His Gospel is often regarded as the most “Jewish” of the Gospels – some believe that it is divided into five distinct sections, to reflect the five books of the Torah (the first five in the Old Testament). Jesus's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel has been described as a new Lawgiving, echoing the original giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses, also on a mountain. Perhaps Jesus' call enabled Matthew to embrace again the faith with which he had grown up, but from which his collaboration with the Gentiles had excluded him. So in Matthew's story, we can clearly see one prototype for Christian discipleship.

Every one of us, however, unworthy we may feel, and whatever mistakes we may have made, is called by Jesus to follow him, and is given the opportunity to respond to that call. It may involve, as it did for both Matthew and the rich young man, the sacrifice of the material riches we cling to for our own security, but Christ promises everyone that he will be with us on the journey, whilst encouraging all of us, too, to go out, to use our possessions to help others, and to make disciples. Matthew's story reminds us of how showing trust and friendship, even to those who seem to give little in return, may result in the blossoming of a new and confident humanity within someone who has been close to despair. And in return, we too, receive Jesus' promise of love and forgiveness, of support on our journey and of his trust in our abilities to serve him in the world. *“Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*