

Have you ever gone inside the doctor's waiting room, and it made your skin crawl just being there? People coughing, and sneezing, and what have you. You could almost see the germs flying around the room. You didn't want to touch anything, or even take a seat. You felt as if you were in a leper colony.

Why couldn't the doctor have different waiting rooms? You know, one for those dreadfully ill. One for those just mildly sick. And one for those in between. But no, if you wanted to see the doctor, you were thrown in with them all.

In our text we see a doctor's office of sorts. It's Matthew's house, and sick people from all parts of the city are there. They're not sick with viruses and other diseases. They are all sick with sin. You have your publicans - the tax collectors, notorious for being cheats and swindlers. You have the wretched refuse of the city - those of ill repute, you know, prostitutes. These are simply labeled as sinners. And Jesus is there. He is there with His disciples.

In walk the Pharisees, and I imagine it makes their skin crawl just being there. They haven't come to see the doctor. They're not sick. They're more like the State Board of Health. They come either to approve or disapprove. And here in Matthew's house they greatly disapprove. Of Jesus, that is. They disapprove of Him even being there. Doesn't He know whose house this is? Doesn't He know what kind of people these are? It should make His skin crawl to be in there with them.

These Pharisees call Him teacher. "*Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?*" they ask His disciples. And yes, Jesus is a teacher. Yet, He is more than a teacher. Because Jesus teaches the Word of God in truth, He is a healer, the healer of souls. This makes Him a doctor, the Great Physician.

And that makes this place today a waiting room, a doctor's office. Does it make your skin crawl just being here? You're surrounded by people who are sick. Sick with sin. You've been thrown in with all these sinners. You don't know where they've been or what they've done. Or maybe, actually, you do. And what about the guy up in the pulpit? Who knows where he's been and what he's done? Who knows, maybe we have cheats and swindlers in here. Maybe even some who have been with those of ill repute.

If your skin is crawling, too bad. Jesus does not have different waiting rooms – one for the most vile sinners, one for casual sinners, and one for those in between. No, we are all thrown in here together. No matter where we've been or what we've done. No matter how sick and utterly sinful we are. This is the only place for sinners to gather.

So, unless you are the State Board of Health, here to approve or disapprove, and I hope for your sake you are not, you are in the place you need to be. Because Jesus does not gather with those who are righteous. He gathers with sinners. He seeks the lost, not those who are found.

Don't you just love the fact that Jesus called Matthew to be one of His disciples? A cheat, a swindler, a pathetic publican. And immediately, Matthew goes out and hosts a banquet for Jesus, inviting all his fellow tax collectors. And not just them, harlots too. It's like Matthew lifted up an old rotting log, and anything that came crawling out he invited to his house.

And they all come. Not because it's pride month, time to be proud of their cheating and swindling; proud of their adultery and prostituting and what have you. Oh no, they come to Matthew's house because it's the doctor's office, for they know the Great Physician will be there. And He is. These all come to Jesus in repentance. And He receives them all. He forgives them all.

That is the only way to come to Jesus. Sick with sin, yes, and being sorry, not proud, of our sinfulness. There is no hymn having the title: "Jesus, Holy Ones will Receive," nor "Jesus, Proud Ones will Receive." There is only, "Jesus, Sinners will Receive."

Your need for Jesus is determined by how great a sinner you are. If you're not much of a sinner, you won't need much of Jesus. Maybe just on Christmas and Easter. If you aren't a sinner at all, you never need to come here to this place where sinners gather with Jesus.

But if you are like me, you need to be here regularly because you, too, are the chief of sinners. And if this is who you are, Jesus is here for you. He is here to give you the medicine you need. The medicine of His precious blood shed on the cross for all sinners, and given to you here in holy words, holy water, and holy food.

It does not make Jesus' skin crawl to be here with you and me. There is no place He would rather be. He is here to heal. He is here to forgive. He forgives you. Your sins He forgives. Even your worst, most vile sins He forgives.

Here He reclines at His table with you. This is not a table for those with pride. This is the table of mercy. Mercy for humble, repentant sinners. This is Matthew's house after all. The place where sinners gather. Where we gather with Jesus our Great Physician. Go in peace, my friend. You are healed. You are forgiven. Amen.