

Dear Friend,

At College United Methodist Church this week we will hear Matthew's testimony. The Gospel reading is Matthew 9:9-13. I'm sure you also have read this verse many times: "*But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners*" (Matthew 9:13, NIV).

We recognize that the Pharisees were upset that Jesus was breaking bread with people who were, to the religious elite of Jesus' time, social and religious outcasts. The Pharisees' quest for perfection under the Law caused them to look with disdain at sinners.

Having dinner with someone implied a deep association, in the culture of Jesus' day. They were enraged that he would connect himself to those who, they assumed, would not be part of God's chosen ones who would spend eternity in his kingdom.

I find myself identifying with both Pharisees and sinners. The world and the church are both filled with them. In my honest moments, I recognize some of both within myself.

This week as I've read this passage again, I realize I've been missing something deeper. This passage reveals **the heart of God**.

God desires mercy, not sacrifice. This is a quote from Hosea 6:6, and it's not just telling us that God wants us to love people more than he wants us to observe ritual holiness. It's revealing to us that God's deepest desire, the thing that is of most importance to God in all the world, is that people come to him, experience his love, and find themselves washed clean.

It's not only a message to us, it is a message *for* us. God is a God of mercy. God doesn't want perfection, he wants his children to experience his forgiveness and to draw near.

With Love,

Pastor Duff