

# Worship Service “ *Who's In?* ”

2nd Sunday of Pentecost, Year A

11<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Romans 4:13-25 CEV / Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26 NRSV

## Prelude

### Opening Music (Video)

[Brother](#) performed by Needtobreathe

feat. Gavin DeGraw, written by Bear and Bo Rinehart, 2013  
NeedToBreathe Music (Admin. by Downtown Music Publishing, LLC)  
KMR Music Royalties II SCSp (Admin. by Kobalt Music Publishing  
America, Inc.), CCLI song number 7029230, used and reported under  
CCLI Streaming License 20261246, uploaded to YouTube by Herbie Follin

## Welcome/Announcements

### Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn      *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*      70

### Call to Worship (responsive)

**One:** This month is a month signifying work toward greater inclusion in every church, workplace, and family.

**All:** **We gather today to be refreshed, renewed, and strengthened in our faith and in our resolve for the work we must do together.**

**One:** Listen, there is a voice calling us.

**All:** **It is the voice of our Divine Beloved.**

**One:** The one who loves us invites us to mingle our voices together.

**All:** **We call out in worship and praise together.**

**One:** Bring your hopes, expectations, and longings that you have carried with you throughout the week.

**All:** **Here they are. We speak them in our spirit and with our words.**

**One:** Come and worship. Come and praise. Come and pray.

**All:** **We commit ourselves to this sacred time of celebration.**

## Invocation

**Reveal Yourself, God,** Reveal Yourself now. Rise up in this assembly. Show us a manifestation of who You are. I call forth a knitting together by Your Spirit Of all created beings within the sound of my voice.

Reveal Yourself, Reveal Yourself now. Awaken within each one of us. Reach out from within each one of us. So that your intangible essence will be felt and known

Reveal Yourself. Reveal Yourself now. You have promised to make yourself known.

I call forth the revelation of Your presence. Of You as Presence within, between, and around us.

We step into Your Sacred Circle, We invite You into our Sacred Circle, As we reveal ourselves to You. We also reach out to You and call upon You. Reveal Yourself now we pray, Amen

## **Epistle Reading Romans 4:13-25 CEV**

God promised Abraham and his descendants that he would give them the world. This promise wasn't made because Abraham had obeyed a law, but because his faith in God made him acceptable.

If Abraham and his descendants were given this promise because they had obeyed a law, then faith would mean nothing, and the promise would be worthless.

God becomes angry when his Law is broken. But where there isn't a law, it cannot be broken.

Everything depends on having faith in God, so that God's promise is assured by his gift of undeserved grace. This promise isn't only for Abraham's descendants who have the Law. It is for all who are Abraham's descendants because they have faith, just as he did. Abraham is the ancestor of us all.

The Scriptures say that Abraham would become the ancestor of many nations. This promise was made to Abraham because he had faith in God, who raises the dead to life and creates new things.

God promised Abraham a lot of descendants. And when it all seemed hopeless, Abraham still had faith in God and became the ancestor of many nations.

Abraham's faith never became weak, not even when he was nearly 100 years old. He knew he was almost dead and that his wife Sarah could not have children.

But Abraham never doubted or questioned God's promise. His faith made him strong, and he gave all the credit to God.

Abraham was certain that God could do what he had promised.

So God accepted him,

just as we read in the Scriptures. But these words were not written only for Abraham.

They were written for us, since we will also be accepted because of our faith in God, who raised our Lord Jesus to life.

God gave Jesus to die for our sins, and he raised him to life, so that we would be made acceptable to God

## Scripture Video

## Romans 4:13-25

### [The Promise To Those Of Abraham's Faith](#)

Lectionary bible reading

A weekly bible reading, from the lectionary, narrated by Douglas Brown. Text from CEV : the Contemporary English Version Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by Permission. Pictures from commons.wikimedia.org

## A Time of Prayer

## Joys and Concerns

## Pastoral Prayer

Long before the change of name, before the first signs of new life showed the beginnings of promises fulfilled, You asked Abram to make his home among foreigners, and share the blessing that was to come.

And now, O God, you ask the same faith of us: The faith to count ourselves among the least, to find our place alongside the poor and broken; The faith to trust in your mercy and your promises, and to share what we have received; The faith to wait expectantly for your reign of justice and equity, together with those who most need its gifts.

Teach us to be children of Abram, sharers of the blessings we enjoy: The blessing of plenty shared with those who have need, The blessing of healing shared with those who are sick and wounded, The blessing of joy shared with those who celebrate and of tears shared with those who grieve, The blessing of friendship shared with those who are excluded, and of solidarity with those who fight injustice,

The blessing of peace shared with those in conflict, and of confrontation shared with those who bring harm;

And in some small way, may our faith and our sharing, help to bring your promises into being in our world. Amen.

**Hymn**                    *Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling*                    **491**

## **Gospel Reading - Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26 NRSV**

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him.

And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax-collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples.

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax-collectors and sinners?'

But when he heard this, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.'

Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.'

While he was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader of the synagogue[a] came in and knelt before him, saying, 'My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.'

And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples.

Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak,

for she said to herself, 'If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.'

Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, 'Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.' And instantly the woman was made well.

When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute-players and the crowd making a commotion,

he said, 'Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him.

But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.

And the report of this spread throughout that district.

## **Message – *Who's In?***

What do we think when we see or encounter people who are fundamentally different than we are? How do we determine what "different" means? Is it physical appearance that sets us apart? Does ethnicity or cultural background play a part? Perhaps it is differences in lifestyle or relationships that catches our eye. There are many criteria we can use to differentiate people from ourselves. It's natural to be observant of the subtleties that make us different from each other. We all have those attributes that set us apart from those we meet or see. However, as our gospel lesson points out this morning, we run into trouble when we start to assign value to those ways in which others differ from ourselves.

In our reading from Matthew, we have several vignettes of interactions Jesus has with several very different people he encounters in the course of his ministry. In the culture in which he lived and worked, these individuals were assigned very different values.

First we have his calling of the tax collector Matthew. Matthew's profession assigned him a very low value in Roman occupied Palestine. Part of a hated class of men who were both instruments of both the Roman overlords and their Jewish client kings, Matthew and his ilk were considered some of the lowest of the low. All who passed him would not deign to acknowledge him even with a glance. Then we have the woman who had been

hemorrhaging for years. Most scholars agree this probably is a reference to a menstrual condition of some sort. In their interpretation of Torah law, this rendered this woman perpetually impure and unclean, unworthy of human contact. Finally we have the daughter of a leader of the synagogue, who has died and his word and touch have revived from the dead. Quite the opposite end of the spectrum from the other two as far as value and acceptance is concerned.

What is the lesson that can be learned from these three very different vignettes? The Pharisees in the lesson struggle with this question. They question why Jesus would share table fellowship with “sinners and tax collectors.” Questioning is often how we learn and expand our understanding.

Theologian Karl Rahner indicated that human beings, are in fact, constituted as a question to which God is the answer; indeed God's own spirit in our depths is the source of our questioning and our longing. Those questions can lead us into the fullness of divine life. Questions can expand our individual and collective boundaries, opening up ever greater space for the divine and human mystery to inhabit.

The Pharisees' question, however, does not appear to have such a noble basis. They acknowledge Jesus as “Teacher,” but their question does not arise from curiosity, wonder, or a genuine desire to learn or understand. They are observing behavior that falls outside the boundaries of acceptability based on their conventional understanding. Their judgment has already been cast; the verdict is in. Those who are righteous according to the law do not break bread with those who are outside the law. The people with whom Jesus associates are already relegated to categories of judgment: “tax collectors and sinners,” all those “others” whose lives render them unrighteous in light of the Jewish law as the Pharisees understand it. Indeed the question posed by the Pharisees is not a question at all, except in the rhetorical sense. But that just illustrates how out of touch they were with the nature of God and faith.

As Paul points out in our passage from Romans today, It wasn't the law that made Abraham acceptable to be the patriarch of God's people, it was his faith. The law wasn't written down yet in his time. Matthew wasn't led to follow Jesus because of his status with the law but the embodiment of God's love and grace so evident in his being.

What about us? How much like the Pharisees in today's story are we? When we look at the people on the screen, which ones are like us, and which ones aren't? More importantly, do we assign any value or judgment to any of them, positive or negative? The picture in the middle is from a previous Annual Conference in our denomination. Pretty homogeneous, isn't it? While many of us have probably made strides in working on our judgment of others, would we be honest if we said we didn't have more work to do? Do we still hold up literal, out of context biblical laws like the Pharisees to excuse our judgment and prejudice of people for just being the human beings that they are? After all, one of our examples would be an outcast just for having an unusual menstrual cycle according to a literal interpretation of Torah law.

Our national discourse these days is full of examples of those who seek to exclude others based on faith, often for just being the human beings that they are. As many celebrate their struggle for recognition and acceptance as human beings this month during Pride, I think it's important that we, like Jesus, seek to bring in those who are cast out in our own world. After all, we know the answer to the Pharisees' question of why Jesus eats with who he does. Because he is the enfleshed Word of God who is known in mercy, not sacrifice, in communion, not separation, in healing acceptance, not judgment. Because he is the divine physician bent on healing and drawn to those most in need of it. There is always room at his table. May we always seek to build bigger tables. Amen.

## **Call to Serve**

We are called to build a community. One beyond the status quo. Beyond our own expectations. This comes at a cost of time, talent, and treasure. Just as Moses stirred the hearts of his people, we are called to be stirred to give toward this Kin-dom we are creating. They brought blue, purple, and crimson linen. They brought fine metals and gems of all kinds. Our gifts are likewise varied. Likewise valuable in the sight of God and each other. It is our willing hearts that make our gifts precious. In our giving, no matter how much or what kind, we connect our spirits and continue the work of Kin-dom Creation.

## **A Time for Reflection**

### **The Prayer of Thanksgiving**

We are all one human family, God. In your love you created us. Through your grace you reach out to us. You are great enough to hold us all in your arms at the same time. Help us to open our hearts to the world that you love. Teach us to weave our lives together. We yield to Spirit, offering what we have to the greater good. In this way, each day, we begin again in love. Amen

**Hymn**     ***For the Healing of the Nations***     **367**

### **Benediction**

Go forth, Carrying with you and within you the strength of God renewed, the power of God assured and the wisdom of God embedded within your spirit and inspired from God's Spirit Go forth In the Name of Love, Amen

## **Postlude**