

**Sermon Text – Sunday, June 7, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Hosea 5:15-6:6; 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Romans 4:13-25**

**Scripture for Message: Matthew 9:9-13; 18-26 - Faith**

Jesus has a lot to say about faith in the New Testament. In Luke chapter 17, the disciples asked Jesus to “Increase our faith” and his reply was, “If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, ‘be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it will obey you.” In Matthew chapter 14, Jesus calls Peter to walk to him on the surface of the water, when Peter takes his eyes off Jesus he begins to sink in fear. Jesus says to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” Again, in the next chapter of Matthew, chapter 15, after a little bit of “discussion” Jesus says to the Canaanite woman who sought healing for her daughter, “Woman you have great faith! Your request is granted.”

There are many more instances of Jesus healing and comforting people. Many times, we notice that he attributes the outcome of those healing encounters to a person’s faith. So, I wonder what came first, the healing miracle or the person’s faith that a miracle could occur? And does having “more faith” guarantee a desired outcome? Maybe some of you have the same questions. This scripture and the reading from Romans this morning have me thinking about faith, where does it come from? We are given a couple examples of faith that we might look at more closely to find answers to our questions.

In the first section of our reading from Matthew’s Gospel, we learn that as Jesus was walking along, he saw a “man named Matthew” who was a tax collector. Jesus spoke two words, “Follow me” and Matthew got up and followed him. Just like that! I think that in itself was a miracle, for anyone to automatically give up their livelihood and follow Jesus into the unknown would be unheard of today, unless of course that person had “great faith.” It was the “miracle” of faith that compelled Matthew to follow Jesus. Not only did Matthew immediately follow Jesus, but he also welcomed Jesus into his home and into his circle of friends – those the Pharisees called “sinners.”

From this scripture we know that Jesus recognized the fact that all sinners need healing. In his letter to the Romans, Paul acknowledges this by writing, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” In Romans, Paul seems to argue that the source of faith does not lie within human power. In fact, in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians Paul writes “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” acknowledging that we are all sinners, therefore we need divine intervention, which is the miracle of faith.

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Jesus came to heal the “spiritually sick” and not to call those who considered themselves righteous. He quotes from the prophet Hosea and “schools” the Pharisees by telling them, “Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’” This quote from Hosea reminds us of what God desires most, we read this morning that immediately following what Jesus quotes, Hosea’s words add “and acknowledgment of God.” In faith, God’s people will seek God. Maybe he is telling the Pharisees that we have faith when we let God be God, look away from ourselves, and respond to God’s promises.

The next section of our scripture reading from Matthew’s Gospel begins, “While he was saying this” and we read that a Jewish religious leader came kneeling before him with a request. Through this action this leader acknowledges his belief that Jesus could do something about the death of his daughter, “come and put your hand on her, and she will live.” The belief of this synagogue leader brought him to the faith of God’s promise to restore and revive God’s people. In this instance the faith was present before the miracle occurred, but was it the promise of God that initiated faith?

As Jesus was going with the synagogue leader, a woman came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. Matthew writes that she said to herself “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.” Not only did this woman believe that Jesus had the power to heal, but she also had faith that through the action of touching Jesus’ cloak she would receive some of that power. Jesus’ response to her not only provides the basis for the miracle of her physical healing, but it also serves to alleviate her social suffering – he called her daughter. Jesus sees her and acknowledges that it was faith that made her well, she had faith before the healing.

After this healing, the passage from Matthew’s Gospel continues to relate the story of the synagogue leader’s daughter. Jesus enters the house and tells the “noisy crowd” to “Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.” Although they laugh in disbelief they go away, Jesus takes the girl by the hand and she gets up. No longer is there disbelief and the news of this healing spreads through all the region. The daughters (both of them) were healed because of faith and the belief that Jesus could heal, likewise, through the miracle of healing, some were brought closer to God and “received” faith.

There is another example of how faith and miracles work together that I find in the reading from Romans. Paul writes, “For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.” Abraham’s faith in God’s promises created the miracle of Isaac’s birth even when Sarah was beyond childbearing

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years. Abraham and Sarah had the faith necessary to “let God be God” and to step out and follow God into the unknown. Paul writes, “He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead, and the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. . . he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.” Robert Jewett, in a commentary on this passage, reminds us that, “Abraham was honored by God because he allowed the divine promise to have its way, fully convinced that God was capable of carrying through with the purpose of creating descendants who similarly lacked any qualifications.”<sup>1</sup> Was it the promise of a miracle that created Abraham’s faith or did his faith in God create the opportunity for a miracle?

There is one more question seeking an answer. Does having more faith guarantee a desired outcome? Jesus, in his responses to his followers, sometimes mentions having “faith as small as a mustard seed” or “you of little faith” or “you have great faith.” Does the amount of faith a person has indicate the amount of power or healing we might receive from God? Would you tell someone who seeks healing that they would receive from God what they needed as long as their faith was strong enough? I’m thinking that it would be a sad response to someone in need. How would you measure the amount of faith a person has? I wonder if that type of thinking springs up from a desire to “earn” our salvation. I’m thinking that Jesus came to people with exactly what they needed regardless of the “amount of faith” they might have in that moment. We can see that in his calling of Matthew; I doubt that Matthew had “great faith” before that moment. My point is that sometimes people that were healed by Jesus received faith after the miracle.

The faith that is exhibited in the examples from our scripture readings today is not wishful thinking or optimistic hope, and, except in Abraham’s case, I don’t believe that these faithful people had a mature understanding of faith developed over time. These faithful people exhibited a mingling of faith and belief. A belief in the promises and power of God as displayed in Jesus, and with faith they turned that belief into action by stepping into the unknown and turning to Jesus for healing. We could say that faith comes from giving all honor and glory to God.

There is always a “so what” in the message from scripture – none of this has any meaning until we try to apply it to our lives in these modern times. “Faith is not a magic potion that solves our disappointments and dashed expectations. . . Faith needs to be lived and practiced in the unknown

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Jewett. *Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible: Romans*. Fortress Press. 2006. Print. 322-342

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circumstance of our lives and in the ever-present reality of disappointment.”<sup>2</sup> Abraham and Sarah lived faith as they believed God would do what God said God would do. Matthew lived faith as he responded to Jesus’ call to ‘Follow Me’ without any hesitation. The synagogue leader and the woman who reached out to touch Jesus both lived faith as they believed that Jesus was capable of healing. How are we living our faith?

Living and practicing faith in the unknown and in the reality of disappointment does not sound like what some followers of Christ signed up for. Why do we think that because we have faith all our desires will be met? I wonder if for that to happen we also need courage to have faith even when we doubt. Remember last week we discussed that faith and doubt were not mutually exclusive – we can have faith amid our doubts.

So, bottom line for me is this, our relationship with God is not strengthened or weakened by the amount of faith we display. Having stronger faith will not give us greater rewards, all of that comes according to God’s will and not our own. What God looks for is whether we are merciful and just, and whether we acknowledge God – faith comes to us in that acknowledgment, giving all glory and honor to God.

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<sup>2</sup> Wyndy Corbin Reuschling. “Romans 4:13-25: Connecting the Reading with the World.” *Connections: Year A, Vol 3*. Eds. Green, et.al. WJK. 2020. Print. 60-62