

2nd Sunday after Pentecost – Sunday 11 June 2023

Gen 12.1-9

Ps 33.1-12

Rom 4.13-25

Matthew 9.9-13, 18-26

May I speak in the name of God; Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. Amen.

Please make yourselves comfortable.

What is God's promise? The promise he made to Abraham when he saw Abraham's faith, when we boil it all the way down... what is it?

God promises Abraham life.

The faith that Abraham had brought him life, through God.

I love Paul's phrasing of Abraham's faith: "Hoping against hope..."

Have you ever hoped against hope? Had a certainty about something even in the face of evidence to the contrary? And has that hope led you to life?

Today's readings are all about faith, hope, love, and life.

What is the purpose of healing stories in the bible? On one hand it is to show who Jesus is. On the other, it is to show the effect of the healing and inspire us to emulate it. Imagine you were a person who suffered an ailment for 12 years which resulted in your abandonment. A woman experiencing 12 years of haemorrhaging is assumed to be suffering from some complication of menstruation. We can assume this because not all blood causes someone to be ritually unclean, but the fact that the woman feels she can only touch the hem of Jesus garment and that she cannot approach him face to face, implies she is not supposed to be where she was.

According to the Law, every person would become ritually unclean eventually. It is a natural part of life, and when you follow the time periods and appropriate rituals, you become clean again and re-enter society. It is unusual for someone who does not have the deadly disease of leprosy to *remain* unclean especially for such a long time. Over a decade. It's longer than the full life span of my daughter!

Imagine the life that is being missed out on. Her family. Her friends. Her ability to participate in worship rituals and learning. She needs to be brought back to life, resurrected.

What about someone like Matthew? A tax-collector. Felt to be a sympathiser and colluder with the occupier; a thief, as some stories tell us that sometimes tax-collectors raised the taxes to give themselves a profit margin and further oppressing an oppressed people. A traitor, on more than one front. What kind of life do you think he had? Maybe he had been shunned from his family life. He certainly wouldn't have been welcome in any synagogue. He too needs to be brought back to life, resurrected.

And the little girl who has died. Her body is now ritually unclean and anyone who comes into contact with her body is also made unclean. Life cut short in this way was not unusual in the 1st century. No matter where in the world one lived, child mortality was extremely high by today's standards. What is extraordinary is that her father, a leader of the community would throw himself at the feet of Jesus while he was breaking the social norms and eating with tax collectors and 'sinners.' This man risked being maligned by the Pharisees that were present to ask for Jesus' love and mercy to return his daughter to life, be resurrected.

In this story, Jesus has already crossed boundaries by welcoming the outcast and dining with them.

With whom do we eat?

In this story, Jesus is asked to contravene purity laws and come to touch a corpse. The father says, "come and lay your hand on her."

Who do we touch?

In this story, Jesus is made unclean by being touched by another who already is. He is not asked for consent, it is taken. And he turns to the woman and calls her daughter.

Who do we love as a son or daughter?

Over the past couple of weeks I have been wondering about us. About this place: this building, these grounds. About the hardship that so many people are experiencing at the moment. This all started when I attended the Lord Mayor's Prayer Breakfast. It was focused on homelessness. Many prayers were said, a lovely breakfast consumed, and some funds raised for Trinity Pantry a charity run by Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Fortitude Valley.

At that time Rev'd Craig from the Uniting church mentioned his vision of a weekly meal offered for the vulnerable and shared amongst the many churches in the area, meaning we would each only host every other month or so. A seed has been planted.

Following that, I happened to have a conversation with a council workman outside here one of the Carpark Café mornings. He had many a bright idea for helping people who are homeless find shelter, if nothing else. Refuge from stormy weather is well worth pursuing. We were standing near the Girl Guides shed and I was looking back at our church, and it occurred to me that we have space, shelter, showers, and toilets. What possibilities lie unnourished and simply need to be noticed and loved to bring them to a flourishing life?

Jesus risked marginalisation to welcome those who fell short of the Law. He drew tax collectors, haemorrhaging women, dead girls, persons with leprosy, persons who were sick, disabled, and he loved them and gave them life. He gave them community.

Do we risk marginalisation to seek out the outcast in today's world? Would you eat with people who are homeless? I think most of us would say yes to that.

When I was 21 I worked in a tobacconist...

What about the youth that have been breaking into people's homes? Would you eat with them? Would you give them the comfort of a touch on the shoulder?

What about a person who sells drugs? Would you risk marginalisation to associate with a drug dealer?

What Jesus did with the people that the local religious leaders had given up on was so politically dangerous that he was murdered for it as an enemy of the state.

My question is what do I risk to bring the promise of God's life-giving love to the outcast of our society? Is my faith in God, or in myself? If my/our faith is in God, then I/we can trust that pull of the Holy Spirit which tells me/us that I/we must go out. I/we can hope against hope, just like Abraham did, and know that God will breathe life into our endeavours through Jesus Christ.

Amen.