

**Based on Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26**  
**Second Sunday after Pentecost**

*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 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.*

Who are God's promises for? That's the question at the heart of these stories from Matthew's gospel. In fact, these stories from the ministry of Jesus show us what he meant at the beginning of the sermon on the mount when he said; "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted," and "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Here we see how a man poor in spirit is called into a new relationship with God and his community, a woman too meek to speak to Jesus is healed, and how a grieving family has their beloved daughter restored to them.

And the means by which all of these broken relationships are mended is faith. Now St. Paul tells us that faith is the expectation of things hoped for, which means that faith is about our willingness to trust in the promises God has offered us; the promise of reunion with the eternal presence of God and the promise of God's love even in the depths of our suffering in this life.

Now faith is a gift, but I believe that this gift is an offer to every human because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. That what Jesus has done for us is that he first gave us an example of how to live the lives we were created for through the example of his own life but in his willing death he expands God's promises from Israel to all of us. All of us

have been given this gift, all of us have been invited into the circle of God's people, and yet still people refuse to accept it, unfortunately.

And I think that one of the reasons people refuse God's gifts because there are still too many people, like the Pharisees in this story who want to act as gatekeepers, to deny inclusion among God's people to those they deem unworthy. As I saw recently on the internet, "if God didn't send Jesus to condemn the world, I doubt he sent you to." I really don't understand why some people think God is so fragile or weak that God should need defending, but they surely do.

To be honest, what I really think is that those who fear the doubters, agnostics, and unbelievers lack faith themselves. They don't really believe in God's promises and so they resort to the powers of the world as a bulwark against their own doubts.

But here's the thing, the opposite of faith isn't doubt – it's certainty. We do not need to have faith in things we can empirically prove for ourselves. We do not need faith to know that the sun rises in the east, or that magnets stick to iron. We only need faith for things we cannot see or cannot prove through experiment or observation. Doubt is actually a useful tool for testing and strengthening our faith.

Through the disciplines of faith, we strengthen the Holy Spirit within us, we open ourselves to the experience of God's presence in our lives, we align our hearts with the needs of others, and we move closer to being the people of God, the people we were created to be.

