

June 7, 2026
Proper 5A
Trinity, St. Louis
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Genesis 12:1-9

Psalms 33:1-12

Romans 4:13-25

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

In the Name of the one, holy and living God. Amen.

The readings from Holy Scripture that we hear this morning are filled with people, some with names, some without, but all familiar to us. There is Abiram, the already-aged ancestor of the promise; there is the tax collector Matthew (sometimes called Levi)¹; there is the leader of the synagogue and his dying daughter (Matthew doesn't name the person, but we know him as Jairus from Mark and Luke²), and there is the nameless, suffering, woman whom Jesus encounters, as if by accident, on the way to heal Jairus' sick child. And there, in the middle, writing to the Romans, is St. Paul, musing on the meaning of faith, and the way it fills up some people to overflowing. The Greek word for faith, "*pistis*," can also be translated as "trust." Either way, in Biblical terms, I think that faith or trust are not things we can possess, as in "I have faith," or "I have trust." Rather, they are conditions, or modes of being, as in "I live in faith," or even better, "I live into faith." Let's take a look at how these folks live into faith.

Today, we begin several weeks of exploring a long set of stories about Abram and various branches of his family tree – which is our family tree. As we begin today, I wonder what it would be like to listen to these stories of Abram with the trust of a child and ask the questions a child asks when they hear these stories. How did God speak to Abram? Why did God choose Abram? How could Abram, at a time when travel was incredibly difficult, take his whole family and all of his animals to journey to some other land without knowing where it was? And what would he find when he got there?

You and I can only guess at the answers to those questions, but one thing seems abundantly clear. Abram was convinced that God had called him, that God had made

¹ Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27.

² The official is not named in Matthew's rendering, but he is identified as Jairus in the other synoptics (Mark 5:22; Luke 8:40).

promises to him, and that God would keep those promises even when such fulfillment seemed utterly impossible.

This is the profound, overflowing faith that St. Paul credits Abraham for living into.³ It was not about adherence to custom or obedience to laws, Paul tells us; it was Abraham's complete trust, complete faith, in the God of promises that compelled him to leave his home, and in so doing become the father of not just one nation, but of many nations. And let's be clear that no one can become a father all on his own, even if our received family stories consistently diminish or erase the role of women in them.

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A similar kind of trust propels the characters in the stories we hear in the gospel. First, we have Matthew, a tax collector, who obeys Jesus' call to follow, eventually becoming a disciple. I can't think of any time in human history when tax collectors were popular. In Jesus' day, they were despised –they collected taxes for the Romans and their puppet ruler, Herod Antipas.

The Pharisees lumped tax collectors together with other "sinners" as a thumbnail for "those people" who were attracted to and welcomed by Jesus' love.

On this day Jesus offers an invitation to the tax collector who sits alone in his booth in Capernaum's marketplace. (Try to picture an IRS agent at Souard or Tower Grove Markets!) But Jesus says, "Follow me," and without any recorded question or hesitation, Matthew gets up and does just that.

But the story goes on. Later, we are told, at dinner, Jesus and his disciples are joined by many tax collectors and sinners. These meals were not public like the meal we offer here on Sunday or Wednesday afternoons, but public in another way, with spectators keeping an eye out for who dined where – like paparazzi before photography.⁴

This is the sort of public meal Jesus is at today. And among those gathered in the courtyard of a house to watch Jesus and assorted "sinners" at table were some Pharisees, who asked, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

Pharisees were concerned about ritual and social purity and would never eat with "those people." Folks of my parents' generation might have said something like, "not

³ There's a lovely kind of echo in that Abraham, like Paul himself, started life with another name.

⁴ Apparently, well into the late nineteenth century, anyone who wanted could come to Lambeth Palace in London on a Tuesday to watch the Archbishop of Canterbury eat his lunch.

our kind, darling” or “it just isn’t very nice.” Sharing a meal with someone offers them a sense of dignity and worth.

“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” The question isn’t addressed to Jesus, but he hears it, just as he was meant to. Jesus’ response is to challenge them with words from the prophet Hosea. “Go and learn what this means,” Jesus tells them: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). It is how you treat one another that matters to God, he tells them, not the rituals that you keep.

The conversation is interrupted by a man in crisis. This man is not one of “those people,” but one who has authority and respect. He’s a leader of the synagogue! This pillar of the community kneels before Jesus to ask him a favor, not for himself but for his beloved daughter. This time, the call to follow is reversed, and Jairus begs Jesus to come to his home to bring his daughter back from the dead.

Jesus, who had just said, “those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick,” responds immediately, and off they go to Jairus’ house. But their progress is interrupted by a woman who is also following Jesus, saying to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.”

I wonder how long she had been following him. I wonder how long she had been repeating to herself, “if I only...” I wonder what drew her this day to reach out, to act in faith, in trust. Jesus tells her that it was that act of faith that brought her healing.

The crowd then continues to Jairus’ house, where the professional mourners, complete with flute players, are in full swing. The daughter of an important man has died, so there’s a lot of noise. But Jesus tells them to go away. Mourners aren’t needed, he says, because the girl isn’t dead, but sleeping.

And they laughed at him. I wonder if they laughed because some of them had seen the little girl die with their own eyes. I wonder if they laughed because they recognized Jesus as the local boy who was a little off. In any case, their laughter was the opposite of faith and trust in Jesus and his word. In this very compact story, Jesus rescues both the woman and the girl from sickness and death, and gives them new life.

Abram, Matthew, Jairus, and the unnamed woman show profound trust in someone beyond themselves: trust in God, the Creator of life.

Despite the probable taunts of his neighbors and complaints of his relatives, Abram abandons everything that is familiar in order to obey God’s call to an unknown place.

Despite the derision and dislike of those who know him as a sinner, Matthew obeys the call of the teacher he has heard from afar and his life is forever changed.

Despite his religious position and respectability, a distraught father approaches a man who eats with sinners to beg for the life of his child.

Despite her despair, a woman ventures into public in order to reach out to the man from whom she has seen love and power flow.

Jesus responds to all of them because he is of, and from, God. He knows that he has come for the sick, not the healthy; for those who recognize that he is filled with mercy, a power much more compelling than external sacrifice, or mere adherence to ritual, or tradition for the sake of tradition, because we've always done it this way.

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God's call, and challenge, for us today is twofold. First, endeavor to see others (especially those you consider "other" with great big air quotes) as God sees them. Or, as we say in the Baptismal Covenant, "to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself."

Sometimes this is easy, like when someone new comes to church, and you welcome them to worship and fellowship. Sometimes, it's more complicated, and requires listening to how others want to be seen and named, honoring the dignity and worth of every human being (again, the Baptismal Covenant).

The second call/challenge is more about interior work, about moving from thinking about faith to acting in faith, living into faith. This is not homework you can complete tonight, or this week, or this year. Like God's call to Abram, it's a lifelong journey with a promise of great blessing. Like the woman who followed Jesus, it requires reaching outside of yourself to touch the source of life and health.

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This twofold call and challenge has a particular intensity to us as we try to live into our faith in the here and now. The juxtaposition of Wear Orange Sunday today, and Juneteenth next weekend reminds us of the work that remains to be done to seek and serve Christ in all persons, honoring their dignity and worth, by creating safe places for the vulnerable, and those the world deems disposable.

On this day, we are called to honor survivors of gun violence, to remember victims of gun violence, and to call for meaningful action to save lives. At the 2024 General

Convention in Louisville, Bishops Against Gun Violence organized a public witness, at which Bp. Deon said: "We stand together in hope. We stand together in faith. We stand together in love. ... We stand as a community committed to making no peace with gun violence. We pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to inflame our lives...with a passion for lasting peace."

Of course, we are outraged whenever we hear of another mass shooting, or an accident with unsecured weapons, or yet another suicide by firearm. But outrage is a dangerous neighborhood in which to live. But if not outrage, then what?

The Prayers of the People today will help focus the ears of our hearts on the plague of gun violence. Suggestions of "what to do" are in your service bulletin, but even lists can be paralyzing. One of the greatest spiritual leaders of the 20th century, Mohandas Gandhi reminded us that, *Almost anything you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.*

Like Abram, Matthew, Jairus and an unnamed woman, God simply calls us to reach out beyond ourselves, to step into faith. None of them had any certainty about what would happen next. Against all odds, in spite of the weight of taunts, derision, respectability, and despair, they just said yes. They acted – deciding to live into faith in a God of life and light and love. It was so with them; it could be so with us.

When you open your hands to receive Holy Communion this morning, I invite you to carry in your hearts the words of that unnamed woman, "If I only," praying that God might take your hand. And then, hand in hand, let the real presence of Jesus the Healer, however you imagine Jesus to be present, fill you with mercy and wholeness and healing. To fill you to overflowing. If you need some words, these might help ...

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light:
Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home.⁵
Amen.

⁵ Words by Thomas A. Dorsey (1899-1993).