Christchurch June 11 2023

Hosea 5:15-6:6

New International Version

**15**Then I will return to my lair  
    until they have borne their guilt  
    and seek my face—  
in their misery  
    they will earnestly seek me.”

**Israel Unrepentant**

**6**“Come, let us return to the Lord.  
He has torn us to pieces  
    but he will heal us;  
he has injured us  
    but he will bind up our wounds.  
**2**After two days he will revive us;  
    on the third day he will restore us,  
    that we may live in his presence.  
**3**Let us acknowledge the Lord;  
    let us press on to acknowledge him.  
As surely as the sun rises,  
    he will appear;  
he will come to us like the winter rains,  
    like the spring rains that water the earth.”

**4**“What can I do with you, Ephraim?  
    What can I do with you, Judah?  
Your love is like the morning mist,  
    like the early dew that disappears.  
**5**Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets,  
    I killed you with the words of my mouth—  
    then my judgments go forth like the sun.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hosea%205%3A15-6%3A6&version=NIV#fen-NIV-22173a)]  
**6**For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,  
    and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.

# Psalm 50:7-15

# New International Version

**7**“Listen, my people, and I will speak;  
    I will testify against you, Israel:  
    I am God, your God.  
**8**I bring no charges against you concerning your sacrifices  
    or concerning your burnt offerings, which are ever before me.  
**9**I have no need of a bull from your stall  
    or of goats from your pens,  
**10**for every animal of the forest is mine,  
    and the cattle on a thousand hills.  
**11**I know every bird in the mountains,  
    and the insects in the fields are mine.  
**12**If I were hungry I would not tell you,  
    for the world is mine, and all that is in it.  
**13**Do I eat the flesh of bulls

“Sacrifice thank offerings to God,  
    fulfill your vows to the Most High,  
**15**and call on me in the day of trouble;  
    I will deliver you, and you will honor me.”

# Romans 4:13-25

# New International Version

**13**It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. **14**For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, **15**because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

**16**Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. **17**As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%204%3A13-25&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28040a)] He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

**18**Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%204%3A13-25&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28041b)] **19**Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. **20**Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, **21**being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

**18**Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%204%3A13-25&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28041b)] **19**Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. **20**Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, **21**being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. **22**This is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” **23**The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, **24**but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. **25**He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

# Matthew 9:9-13

# New International Version

### The Calling of Matthew

**9**As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

**10**While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew’s house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. **11**When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

**12**On hearing this, Jesus said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. **13**But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%209%3A9-13%2CMatthew%209%3A18-26&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23393a)] For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”

### Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman

**18**While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.” **19**Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

**20**Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. **21**She said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.”

**22**Jesus turned and saw her. “Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you.” And the woman was healed at that moment.

**23**When Jesus entered the synagogue leader’s house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, **24**he said, “Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him. **25**After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. **26**News of this spread through all that region.

Homily

The two stories in Matthew’s which we have just listened to are worth revisiting for another moment. We have heard them many times before and not just in Matthew’s gospel for they also appear in accounts from other evangelists. Maybe we are sure we already know them well enough that there is nothing new or interesting to learn from them. But they are not set in aspic. Times change and contexts too and these narratives still talk to us in and for our day.

Looked at in our time and our context these stories are rich with meanings and messages some Christians do not seem to want to hear. For a start these are not parables that we have to strain to understand. There is nothing here that is abstract. These are straightforward factual accounts of Jesus every day life, out and about, meeting people, making decisions, doing things, connecting with human beings in real situations. It is true that not all the facts are clear. Who is this Matthew that Jesus calls to follow him? Is he the same Matthew as the author of the Gospel? But such a question is just a distraction from the heart of the event.

Whoever this Matthew is we know that he regarded locally among Jesus neighbours as something of a low life, a tax collector, a neighbour’s child who betrays his own people by collaborating with the oppressive Roman authorities and who enriches himself by overcharging the people and pocketing the extra cash for himself. Yet this is the man Jesus quite deliberately invites to become one of his disciples. This is the man Christ chooses to dine with. A corrupt man. This is the man who remarkably immediately sees in Jesus invitation a way to personal redemption. He does not count the cost of giving up his lucrative profession to follow Jesus. He just gets up and follows him such is the force of Jesus encountered one on one.

Jesus too is not in the least bit put out by the chorus of criticism from the neighbours who are offended that Jesus, their local celebrity, should be seen in the company of a man most others shunned. The message is clear. Jesus expresses a fulsome love and care that refuses to be limited by human judgments that demonise and exclude, that make so many feel unwelcome for reasons well or ill-founded.

This Jesus welcomes and embraces all. He will not be found in any picket line or protest designed to demonise or exclude the refugee, the immigrant, the newcomer amongst us. He will not be among even those who have reason to distrust and dislike Matthew. He will instead be the helping hand, the smiling face, the one who offers hope and help to the desperate and the destitute and yes even the Matthews of this world. He will feed them, clothe them, sit with them, listen to them, encourage them, embrace them. He will quite simply love them. There is no other way for Jesus to be. There is no other way for Christians to be.

In the weeks leading up to the encounter with Matthew Jesus had performed many miracles. He was the talk of the district. Matthew would certainly have heard the talk. When his personal invitation came from Jesus to follow him, he could see God’s love and grace at work, at first hand, interrupting his life of depravity, cutting across all the barriers others placed in the way of friendship and neighbourliness, making him believe he could be whole again, making him see he could be holy. He literally jumped at the chance. There was nothing else like it, nothing. There still is not.

For the synagogue leader whose daughter had died, Jesus was a last hope. Anyone who has ever lost a child will know how convulsive was his grief, how desperate the desire to see her alive again, well again. That father will have known that in raising her from the dead Jesus was merely giving her an unknown length of extra years, that death would find her again one day as it finds all of us. But somehow Jesus ability to call the child back to life made sense of death, made life after death believable, made life before death meaningful. We can see in the child and the woman who was cured that same day of long-standing haemorrhages, the desperation of the chronically ill who yearn for cures that will liberate them from the misery of suffering, the panic of the millions vulnerable to pandemics who yearn for the vaccine that will keep them safe from death at least for now. This is our time and our context.

Christ took the girl by the hand and cured her. He healed the woman without touching her. All over the world in laboratories scientists commit their lives to finding cures for illnesses, diseases and conditions that make life miserable for so many. They never give up. All over the world in hospitals, hospices, clinics and homes, doctors, nurses, carers, technicians, and administrators and families, make healing their vocation, taking people by the hand, helping them back to health or easing their journey to death. They never give up. All over this world good people run races, hold raffles, coffee mornings, rattle charity boxes, and do a million voluntary, inventive things to raise the funds that allow a parent to see their sick and dying child restored to life or eased gently to whatever lies beyond this life, funds that promote breakthrough medical research, that heals without touching.

On this day let us be grateful for such healers, who whether they believe in God or not do the work described in Matthew’s gospel. To be sure among them are men and women from backgrounds, ethnicities, sexual orientations, genders, that once made them despised or outcast like Matthew but like him they confounded their detractors and followed the way of grace and goodness, filling our world, transforming it, through the work of their hands, with the love that alone makes sense of this life, this death. For as we heard in Romans this our God is the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

This is the God who says in today’s Psalm and every day:

“call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” How will we honour our God. It is Matthew who shows us how by getting up and following him.