**Weekend of Sunday, June 11, 2023**

**2nd Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary 10/Year A**

**First Reading: Hosea 5:15-6:6**

**Second Reading: Romans 4:13-25**

**Gospel Reading: Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26**

**Sermon Title: *“Demonstrating God’s Mercy and Power”***

**Theme**

*Though Jesus was a devout Jew who practiced his faith, he was criticized for eating with tax collectors and sinners—the religiously nonobservant. Jesus criticizes the self-righteous and reminds us that* ***mercy is to be at the heart of our religious practices****. God continues to be made known in those on the* ***margins of society****, like Matthew the tax collector and the hemorrhaging woman. As we gather each Lord’s day we receive the healing that makes us well and sends us forth to be signs of God’s mercy for the world.*

**Texts:**

### First Reading: Hosea 5:15--6:6

Because the people have trusted in military powers and not God, God decides to withdraw from the scene until Israel acknowledges its guilt and seeks God’s face. The response of the people does not acknowledge this guilt and is as fickle as fog or dew burned away quickly by the sun. God desires loyalty rather than words or meaningless deeds.

 15I will return again to my place
  until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face.
  In their distress they will beg my favor:

 6:1“Come, let us return to the Lord;
  for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us;
  he has struck down, and he will bind us up.
 2After two days he will revive us;
  on the third day he will raise us up,
  that we may live before him.
 3Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord;
  his appearing is as sure as the dawn;
 he will come to us like the showers,
  like the spring rains that water the earth.”

 4What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
  What shall I do with you, O Judah?
 Your love is like a morning cloud,
  like the dew that goes away early.
 5Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets,
  I have killed them by the words of my mouth,
  and my judgment goes forth as the light.
 6For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
  the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

### Second Reading: Romans 4:13-25

Paul presents Abraham as a living model of right relationships. For Abraham and for us, a right relationship with God involves trusting that God’s promises will be fulfilled because God makes the dead alive and calls into existence what otherwise does not exist.

13The 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. 14If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.
 16For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us, 17as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”)—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So numerous shall your descendants be.” 19He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. 20No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22Therefore his faith “was reckoned to him as righteousness.” 23Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, 24but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

### Gospel: Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

Jesus demonstrates God’s mercy and power, accepting the unacceptable and curing the incurable. Even the dead receive new life.

9As 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.
 10And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. 11When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” 12But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 13Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

 18While 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.” 19And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. 20Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, 21for she said to herself, “If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well.” 22Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” And instantly the woman was made well. 23When Jesus came to the leader’s house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, 24he said, “Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.” And they laughed at him. 25But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. 26And the report of this spread throughout that district.

**Sermon**

I think we would have to agree that generally, you know me better than I know you. Generally, that is. I know some of you better than others because of the ministry I have done with you. But every week I stand before you and often shed another layer of my crusty self revealing new aspects of myself – whether you want to know it or not. Today is one of those days when it will be more obvious than other days.

The evangelical movement encourages folks to be able to name and claim the time of their salvation. One might say, "I was a hard-partying rock & roll hippie until that night at the Bill Graham Crusade. It was like an out-of-body experience, I was sweating and the hair on the back of my neck stood up, and I was compelled to go to the altar call, and that is where I got saved and received Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior."

A true story about myself. When I was about 16, one of those hard-partying rock & roll hippie types who got saved and became a Jesus freak – a real term we used in the 70s – was invited to our Lutheran youth group. He played the guitar and sang Jesus songs and gave his testimony. As he went on, I began to sweat and the hair on the back of my neck stood up. I did not know what was going on with me.

Maybe you have had an experience like the one I am speaking of. These experiences are real and transformative and I am not making fun of them. God seeks and saves in innumerable creative ways. But through my rudimentary 16-year-old understanding of Lutheran theology, I thought I *was* saved. So then, what was up with the sweating and the hair on the back of my neck standing up, I wondered?

I was raised by Christian parents who took me and my siblings to church and Sunday School and so on ever every week since I was born. So I did not have a singular conversion experience. Instead, I have continual conversion experiences. Hardly a day goes by when I am not confronted by the love, grace, and mercy of God revealed in Jesus Christ in my life, and sometimes it is breathtaking. And when I have those experiences I am reminded that those experiences are all about God in Christ who saved me – often despite myself – and have nothing to do with me getting myself saved. It would take me years to be able to articulate what I experienced.

Maybe you can relate. Maybe you can't name it and claim it either (your commitment to Christ, that is), but that doesn't make your salvation any less true. A Lutheran understanding of salvation is that God in Christ did all the saving we need on the cross. The only thing we contribute is our sinfulness. And our Lutheran understanding of salvation is that while it was *once and done on the cross*, we have a daily need to revisit our baptism as Martin Luther said, and just to be clear, that doesn't mean I need to drive to Warsaw, IN every day and stare at the font I was baptized at. It means that we should reflect on the grace of God in Christ every day, in that while we continue to miss the example of godly living established by Jesus Christ, we are, never-the-less, baptized and saved for eternity.

(Pic 1 – Map) The Gospel Reading takes place in Capernaum, sometimes called the Village of Miracles, because, as you heard in the Gospel Reading, Jesus performed several miracles there.

(PIC 2 – Arial View) I've been to the ruins of Capernaum. Capernaum was a small fishing village on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was also the home of Peter, his brother Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee, James, and John. And it was while Jesus walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee that Jesus encountered these four fishermen and called them to join him in ministry – and they did! Doesn't sound like a sweating, hair-raising experience does it?

(Pic 3 - Synogogue) Jesus made the home of Peter his home base during much of his Galilean ministry (Matthew 4:13). There was a synagogue there and on his first Sabbath in Capernaum, Jesus taught in it, and while he was teaching a man with an unclean spirit entered and Jesus called the spirit out of him in dramatic form, which amazed the townsfolk. He quickly gained a reputation as one with the power to heal the sick and infirmed. It was Peter's roof that was removed so that the friends of a paralytic could lower him down through the roof to be healed by Jesus (Mark 2:3-5).

(Pic 4 – Peter's Church) In 1968, near the ruins of the synagogue, archaeologists excavated the site of a Christian church built in the first century. And as they excavated deeper they found that the church had been built over a home. The walls of the home were plastered and painted with hundreds of crosses. On the limestone floor were found many fragments of votive lamps, signifying this house had been singled out from earliest times for special veneration. On the walls of the home were graffiti in many languages: “Lord Jesus Christ, Help;” “Christ Have Mercy;” and “Most High God.”

There are 124 inscriptions in Greek, 18 in Syriac (one mentioning the Eucharist), 15 in Hebrew, and 2 in Latin. One in Latin says, “Peter, Helper Of Rome.” So many inscriptions in so many languages suggest this was a place of pilgrimage for early believers.

When Emperor Constantine’s mother, Helena, made a tour of Palestine in 325-327 CE, this home in Capernaum was pointed out to her as the home of Peter. She made the home into a church that was visited 50 years later by a Spanish pilgrim who wrote in the diary of her pilgrimage: “In Capernaum the house of the prince of the apostles became a church. The walls, however, of the house have remained unchanged to the present day.” So through the ministry of Jesus, the sleepy little fishing village of Capernaum became the village of miracles and a pilgrimage site to this day.

(Pic 5 – Modern Church) In 1989 the Pilgrimage Church of St. Peter was built by the Franciscans who also operate a monastery nearby.

Well, I hope you enjoyed that. I know I did.

(Theme Slide) In the Gospel Reading, we find Jesus in Capernaum where he encounters a tax collector by the name of Matthew. In Matthew, we witness the transformative power of an encounter with Jesus. When he encountered Jesus, did he begin to sweat and did the hair on the back of his neck stand up? We don't know, but Jesus extends an invitation to Matthew, a despised tax collector and social outcast, saying simply, "Follow me." In response, Matthew leaves everything behind and becomes a disciple.

While in Capernaum, Jesus dines with tax collectors and sinners, showing compassion and offering the opportunity for transformation and salvation. He brings healing to a woman who suffered for years and raises a girl from the dead. These encounters reveal Jesus' heart for the lost, the broken, and the marginalized. I bet those people could name and claim the day they became believers and got saved.

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

What does this passage teach us? I am so glad you ask. It reminds us that God in Christ desires mercy and an intimate and authentic relationship. It reminds us that we have to allow ourselves to become open and vulnerable to the working of the Holy Spirit. This reading challenges us to have faith, even when the odds seem insurmountable. And more importantly today, it calls us to be like Jesus, extending love, compassion, and healing to all, especially those in need. While Jesus does call us to make disciples and teach, we also need to recognize that we are not the ones who bring them to salvation. After we have extended the love, grace, and mercy of God, the Holy Spirit is responsible for bringing them to that intimate and authentic relationship with God revealed in Jesus Christ where salvation can be received.

In a time when the world seems filled with division, hatred, and brokenness, we are called to be agents of transformation. We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus, showing mercy, extending grace, and offering hope. We are called to break down barriers, reach out to the marginalized, and share the transforming power of the Gospel.

May we never forget the depth of God's love for us and the amazing grace He has given us. Like Peter and Matthew, none of us deserve the love, grace, and mercy of God. But the Holy Spirit of God revealed in Christ, has called us in innumerable creative ways to drop what we are doing and follow him into a life of discipleship under the lordship of Jesus Christ. May we trust in his promises and have faith that moves mountains. May we embrace our role as ambassadors of reconciliation and bearers of the light of Christ

As we leave today, let us go forth, inspired by the example of Abraham's faith, the compassion of Jesus, and the call for mercy in Hosea. May our lives reflect the love of Christ, bringing healing, redemption, and hope to a world in need. May we be the instruments through which God's unlimited mercy and power are demonstrated.

**Prayer**

Lord God, who are we to lead others to you? In our opinion, we may not have dramatic stories of transformation; can't name and claim the moments we got saved. And yet, you call us to simply be who you made us to be, and tell others how your love, grace, and mercy demonstrated through your Son's ministry have transformed our lives. Inspire us with your Holy Spirit to be faithful in that call. We pray this in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen