

# Faith and Acceptance ...

## *... and the ministry of 'touch'*

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*A sermon given on the First Sunday after Trinity 11th June 2023 – by John Franklin, the President of the Christian Service Unit, Khammam, Andhra Pradesh, India.*

*Romans 4:13-end; Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26*

Good morning. My name is Franklin. I am representing a charity called Christian Service Unit (CSU). This was Christ For All (CFA) in Andhra Pradesh previously. I'm happy to be here today. Thank you, Vicar Jonathan and Dawn Pollard and Mike for making these arrangements.

So if we look at the Epistle, today's reading, it says faith, not law. Paul explains that God made promises to Abraham and his descendants that can only be received by the faith and not by keeping the law. The passage emphasises the importance of faith in God's promises and how it leads to justification and a right relationship with God.

Prior to this, I would like to say when yesterday I just inquired what is my time slot? She said ten to 15 minutes. In India our services starts with like a minimum of ten minutes of opening prayer. So I concise it a bit - kindly bear with me because this is the word of God we have today.

Paul now brings the word law back into the discussion. For the 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. The law of Moses was not even around in the days of Abraham. Paul is saying that the promise was not given by law at all. God did not say if you do this or that I will bless you. No, he simply said he would bless him. It was an unconditional promise - Abraham, you are going to have a descendants enough to fill the earth and the whole world is going to be blessed through you. Abraham believed that promise and that is why he was counted as righteous. It was not on the basis of law because if it is the adherent of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null. It is either faith or law. It cannot be both. If we are saved by our works, then we are looking to our works, not trusting in God. If Abraham had earned this blessing by keeping a law, then there would be no point in mentioning his faith. But even more seriously, Paul says that if salvation is by law then the promise would be void, for the law brings wrath: the promise would do us no good because we all fall short of what the law requires; we are sinners and all the law can do for us is bring wrath and punishment; it cannot deliver the promises because by its criteria we fall short.

If salvation is by faith, then we have no hope. The good news, however, is that where there is no law, neither is there violation. If salvation is not on the basis of the law, then we cannot disqualify ourselves through our transgressions. Since the law is not part of the method by

which we are saved. Our sins are not part of the picture either. They don't take away what God has given to us by promise. God has done something for us that we cannot do for ourselves. He sent His Son to bear our sins, and through trust in the Gospel we have justification. That is to say, we are in a right relationship with God.

This is the summary of what I have from the Epistle's reading and according to the Gospel reading, we see Matthew's call and the twin restoration of the woman with flow of blood and ruler's daughter.

Both passages explain the nature of ministry, that of Jesus as well as the church. Jesus calls Matthew to follow him, yet Jesus follows Matthew and the sinners to the table. Meanwhile, the desperate ruler and the suffering woman prevail upon Jesus to win his touch. Jesus reaches out to the tax collector, but he finds himself apprehended by those seeking his healing touch.

So it may be with the church ministry, sometimes we go forth and identify ourselves with those on the margins. In other cases, the needs of the others draw the church beyond its comfortable boundaries. The Gospel relates the call of Matthew and describes Matthew as seated at his tax collection station. Jesus calls Matthew to follow him. As it turns out, he accepts hospitality in Matthew's house - there, he shares a table with his typical crowd, tax collectors and sinners. Several sources indicate tax collectors have a wicked reputation, but the story shares all we really need to know. The Pharisees perceives tax collectors and sinners as natural companions, and Jesus himself compares them not to those who are well, but to those who are sick. Jesus says the healthy do not need a physician while the sick do. That he has come to call not the righteous, but sinners. And Jesus's companionship with sinners appears to be just that - companionship and not treatment. Jesus has many harsh words to say in the first Gospel, but he directs none of them at sinners. (His inaugural message is a call to repent and he later denounces the cities he has visited for failing to repent.) [*Audio unclear: He pronounces O. Agnest scripts and the pharisees.*] He does not demand their [*the sinners*] repentance, he simply eats and drinks with them.

Jesus often receives credit for touching a woman with a bloody discharge and for touching a dead girl's body. The girl's father is the one to suggest that Jesus, "Lay your hand upon her." Jesus eventually does the touch the girl, restoring her to life, but not before the haemorrhaging woman sneaks up and touches Jesus first. She, not he, crosses the boundaries between purity and impurity. She, not Jesus, proves that purity is more contagious than impurity.

Could it be that the girl's father and the haemorrhaging woman draws Jesus out to the ministry of touching? The first is, 'If I can just get Jesus to come and touch my daughter, will my daughter, she will live.' The second, 'If I can touch Jesus, I will be made well.' So in touching

someone, Jesus is showing that he is a personal and tender saviour, to touch conveys love: when a family member returns, you embrace them; you hug your wife; hold hands; kiss. All these are signs of intimacy. The Gospel uses the word hands, fingers and touch nearly 200 times. And the words often refer to Jesus: Jesus put out his hand and touched him; so he touched her hand; he went in and took her by the hand; then he touched their eyes; immediately, Jesus stretched out his hands; Jesus came and touched them; then little children were brought to him that he might put his hands on them and pray. Jesus was not afraid to touch others: a leper's skin did not disgust him; nor did he hesitate to handle the filthy feet of his disciple in the upper room.

Now he wants to use our hands to send the same message of love, humility and acceptance.

Let us take a moment - think it over. Let us think and meditate the core content of the sermon.

May God bless you all. Thank you.

# Reading Texts

## **Romans 4:13-end**

<sup>13</sup> For the 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. <sup>14</sup> If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. <sup>15</sup> For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. <sup>16</sup> For 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, <sup>17</sup> as 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. <sup>18</sup> Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become 'the father of many nations', according to what was said, 'So numerous shall your descendants be.' <sup>19</sup> He 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. <sup>20</sup> No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup> Therefore his faith 'was reckoned to him as righteousness.' <sup>23</sup> Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him', were written not for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup> but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, <sup>25</sup> who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

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

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

<sup>18</sup> 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." <sup>19</sup> And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. <sup>20</sup> Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, <sup>21</sup> for she said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made

well." <sup>22</sup> Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well. <sup>23</sup> When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, <sup>24</sup> he said, "Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. <sup>25</sup> But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. <sup>26</sup> And the report of this spread throughout that district.