

“Where Does Faith Lead Us?”

Romans 4:13-25, Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

Our readings for past week contain several faith stories. The most prominent one was the call of Abram and Sarah. In the gospel reading we have the story of Matthew’s calling, the woman who suffered hemorrhage and the synagogue official whose daughter died. There are a lot of themes that can be pursued from these stories. It speaks about the nature of God’s calling, Paul in his letter to the Romans mentioned the story of Abram and Sarah and relate it to his theme about righteousness by faith, while Matthew blended his calling with healing episodes.

I am reading these stories with the backdrop of two events that shakes us in our two congregations (Fil-Am and Union); the critical situation of Peter who had been in the ICU since Tuesday and Cloy’s diagnosis of non-Hodgkin’s disease. These are difficult moments not just for Charlotte who painfully watched a son with all the life support system in his body, and so with Cloy and with Joel and Jen as they receive the doctor’s word and carefully plan out how to proceed.

It is difficult for us all well, for Marion who stood beside Charlotte and for us who consider Cloy as part of our families as well. If there is one thing we can definitely say about our congregation – it is not just about our size that enables us to know and to relate to each other more closely but above all the strong bond of fellowship as a family united in our faith in Christ.

It is impossible not to be involved in a personal level what Charlotte and Cloy and Joel and Jen felt. All of us go through with the pains, the shock, the hopes and the longing that are in their hearts. We ask difficult questions to God as we also explore the spiritual resources that can sustain us in this time of need. So we go back to the Scripture and discern God’s word as we seek guidance on where our faith leads us. I find significance in these four stories of faith in the way we face realities in daily living. I see in the characters a faith that leads them to take risks.

I could not understand why a man of 75 years old with a substantial property in a country that provided him safe haven would take the risk of moving to unknown territory. It is beyond the logic of the mind – Abram and Sarah made a very risky decision in moving out from Haran to the Land of Promise which was not even certain at the beginning of the call and the journey.

Who would have thought that Matthew, a tax collector, who may not be liked by many but lived a life of relative comfort, leave his job and follow Jesus. While others have to break their backs in the fields, Matthew can earn

a living through the share of the taxes he collected. But Matthew took the risk not knowing what comes next as a disciple of the man whom he meet and invited him to come and follow.

Think about the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. Being a Jew, she knew the rules and regulations about the period when one is considered clean or unclean. But she had in her heart the faith that says; *'If I only touch his cloak I will be made well.'* It was a very personal faith, she kept it to herself. But what about the scenario if Jesus knew about what she had done. How will he react? Would Jesus be angry for making him unclean, knowing that many regarded him a rabbi and people flocked around him all the time thereby making all them unclean because of that single act of touching Jesus garment. But she took the risk and touched it anyway.

Think of the leader of the synagogue, in the parallel stories he was identified as Jarius. How can he a leader of the synagogue knelt and humble himself before Jesus who was not even part of the official religious institution of his time. What would people think of him? But his love for his daughter was so great that he was willing to risk his whole reputation as a leader of the synagogue as long as she will be healed. In fact, his daughter was not just sick, she was dead.

Faith in God leads us to take risks, not because we don't care but because we profoundly trust the one who called us or the one to whom we rely. I like the idea of one writer who illustrates the concept of faith and taking risk through a piece of rope used in mountain climbing. He said you cannot say I have faith in the strength and the capacity of a rope until such time when you use it. That moment you throw it and start ascending to the top and realizing while hanging on a cliff with that rope in your hands that this is only the thing that separates you from life and death. He said then you can truly say, I believe in the rope and I trust in its strength because I am taking the risk of entrusting my whole life with this piece of rope.

We know the strength of faith when we take the risk of faith in daily living. Abram and Sarah, Matthew, Jarius and the unnamed woman knew the strength of faith because they took the risk. If we always calculate and refuse to decide or act because it's risky, then we will not know the power and the strength of faith, the greatest resource that God has provided us.

William Arthur Ward challenge people to risk in these words:

"To laugh is to risk appearing a fool. To weep is to risk appearing sentimental. To reach out to another is to risk involvement. To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self. To place your ideas and dreams before a crowd is to risk their loss. To love is to risk not being loved in return. To live is to risk dying. To hope is to

risk despair, To try is to risk failure. But risks must be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing. The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing, is nothing.

He may avoid suffering and sorrow, But he cannot learn, feel, change, grow or live. Chained by his servitude he is a slave who has forfeited all freedom. Only a person who risks is free.”

Faith in God leads us to take greater risks!

Faith leads us to the heart of God. There are two characters of God that keeps coming back as to me against the backdrop of our experience this week.

In these stories, we encounter the **God who blesses**. The word blessing was repeated several times in Abram’s call. Those who walk with God in faith know what it means to receive blessings from God because this is God’s heart. We have a God who blesses because God wants us to be a blessing to others. God’s blessing in our life is reflective of God’s intention for us. The life of Abram and Sarah and Matthew and all those who believe in the living God was meant to shine, they were meant to be blessings. A sage of old has said, *“Do not let any experience in life pass through you without getting a blessing out of it.”* And I would add in the light of our faith in the God we encounter through Bible, *“without sharing this blessing to others.”* Our faith leads us to the heart of a God who blesses.

We also know the heart of a **God who heals**. This is what we affirm today, as we think of Cloy and Peter. God does not only cure but above all God heals. If there is one thing that people agree about Jesus – it is the testimony that he has the power to heal. The woman who had hemorrhage for 12 years was determined to touch the cloak of Christ because she knew Jesus possessed the power to heal. So with Jarius, he knelt before Jesus because he knew that he can heal his daughter. And true indeed they know first hand the heart of a God who heals. Just as sickness and diseases are personal experiences, Jesus also dealt with the woman and the child on a personal level. Jesus took time to stop and talk to her personally and said, *“Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.”* On the part of the child who actually died, this is how Matthew recorded the event, *he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.*

Many of us today face overwhelming challenges in life. It comes in many forms – the future of our children and our families and our own future as well, the battle of non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma for Cloy, the pain and the excitement of waiting and watching, for Joel and Jen and Charlotte. Whatever it is – let us not forget the faith that shapes us and leads us to where we are right now, faith in the God of our fathers and mothers, the God

who revealed in Jesus and the God who walks with us today. Let us take the risk with God to discover and to know first hand God's heart – the God who blesses and the God who heals.

8th June 2008
4th Sunday After Pentecost

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June 8, 2008 – 1:30 P.M.

Preacher: Rev. Reuben D. Cedino
Sermon: "*Where Does Faith Lead?*"

SCRIPTURE READING:
Epistle: Romans 4:13-25
Gospel: Matthew 9: 9-13, 18-26

Anthem: "In Every Breath"
Fil-Am UCC Choir

Liturgist: Ms. Ma. Teresa P. Rivera
Pianist: Mr. Noel P. Rivera III
Organist and Choral Director: Ms. Rachel A. Dadap

Mr. Joel V. Pal, *Elder-in-Charge*
Danny & Gladys Vidal-Dagdayan, *Ushers*
Ms. Elsa C. Trumata, *Steward-in-Charge*
Gladys, Danny, Bibok Dagdayan, *Floral Offering*