

## “FAITH FOR THE FUTURE!”

Virginia Synod Assembly Sermon  
11 June 2023

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26  
2 Pentecost A

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Good morning! I am Bishop Bob Humphrey and I bring you greetings from your siblings in Christ in our Virginia Synod, ELCA especially those attending the Virginia Synod Assembly this weekend. By the time you gather for worship on Sunday morning we may well know whom The Holy Spirit has called to be our next Synodical Bishop!

It has certainly been my privilege to serve in this Office the past 6 years. Thanks be to God and thank you! Our ELCA says, “We are church together!” In our Virginia Synod we are lifting up the many ways God has been FAITHFUL+BOLD+SERVING and calls us to be and do the same! At our Synod Assembly we are considering the ways God leads us through the wilderness as we keep our eyes and focus on the Cross of Christ and live lives devoted to following Jesus.

Let us pray... *Lord, grant that your word is proclaimed in truth and received with joy! Amen.*

The readings before us today are all wonderful supports to these major truths. In Genesis God reminds Abram, as he prepared to leave his comfortable life behind. that God will be with him in the wilderness, and, “*in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*” (Genesis 12: 3b NRSV)

Psalms 33 reminds all who wander in the wilderness of life, “[*God*] loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.” (Psalm 33:5 NRSV).

St. Paul instructed the Romans, and now us, that it was because of Abraham’s faith, not Abraham’s works or good deeds that God fulfilled God’s promises. And, Martin Luther reminds us in his explanation to the third article of the Apostle’s Creed that faith is not something we can produce, but is itself a gift from God through the resurrection of Christ and the power of The Holy Spirit! God’s grace alone is at work! St. Paul writes, “*Therefore [Abraham’s] faith ‘was reckoned to him as righteousness’.*” (Romans 4:22 NRSV)

Which brings us to the Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew. Jesus goes against all expectations and breaks religious laws when he invites a hated traitor (in the eyes of many) to follow him and then proceeds to hang out and eat with all sorts of unseemly and unclean (in the eyes of many) people, saying, “*I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.*” (Matthew 9:13b NRSV) And then, to really rub it in Jesus has mercy on one of the religious leaders; allows a rejected woman to receive healing power and raises a little girl from the dead! Jesus’ love is for everyone! No one is excluded, not the sinners, not the church leaders, not the hurting or hated. No one is left behind!

So, what do you think this means for us today? Maybe the same thing it has always meant. God is the one who is FAITHFUL + BOLD + SERVING and if we can just get our own biases and opinions out of the way and follow where Jesus leads... and do what Jesus does – that is... accompany those the world, and too often the church, rejects – Don’t worry... God will provide everything needed for the journey, especially when the journey leads into the wilderness! God will give us the faith to trust that God will do what God has promised – just like always...

Just as Abraham and Sarah, Rebekah, Ruth, Joseph, the Psalmists, Mary the Mother of Jesus, the disciples and apostles, Mary, Martha, the women at the tomb, St. Paul, the Ethiopian Eunuch, Martin Luther, Martin Luther King, Jr. and millions throughout the ages have discovered... “Peace be with you, dear church!” Peace be with you! This is an exciting day, indeed! A new chapter is unfolding and God is always with us and gives us everything we need, including Faith for the Future! Can I get an Amen?... In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen!