



June 8 • 2008

Focus Scripture
Matthew 9:9–13,
18–26

Additional Scriptures
Genesis 12:1–9
Psalm 33:1–12
Romans 4:13–25

Open our hearts, O God, that we might better understand what it means to live in hope as we follow your leading. Enable us to live with openness to, and trust in, the restoration you bring. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

Restoring Love

God’s powerful and restoring love provides a fresh start. In today’s texts, those who encounter Jesus experience new lives of wholeness as they believe and respond. Abraham and Sarah follow God’s leading, “hoping against hope” in God’s promise of a new family. All find that God’s restoring work leads not to what has been, but to what can be in God’s reign.

Focus Scripture: Matthew 9:9–13, 18–26

The stories within the focus scripture reflect the situation facing the church members who were Matthew’s first readers. At that time, Jewish and Christian communities remained related, though in conflict. When disputes arose between synagogue and church, the church turned to Jesus’ words for response.

The Pharisees were important leaders in the Jewish community after the temple’s destruction in 70 CE. In this text, some Pharisees question the disciples about Jesus’ choice of dining companions. Before they can answer, Jesus explains his mission to call out to those in need of healing and wholeness.

This text has several layers of call and response. Jesus calls Matthew to follow. Matthew responds. Jesus’ encounter with the Pharisees reveals that he has come to call sinners, the very ones whose presence at table with Jesus causes concern among the upstanding citizens of his day, and ours. Ironically, the next person who comes to Jesus is a religious leader. This leader calls on Jesus for help, and Jesus follows.

Seemingly irrational hope flows through these stories. Matthew, whose occupation as a tax collector would have set him apart from respectable community, had no reason to imagine a life of purpose in God’s realm. The religious leader had no rational reason to hope that his daughter’s death would be reversed. The woman whose illness had separated her from community for over a decade had no reason to think that she would be able to get close to Jesus.

Through these stories, Matthew tells the good news of God’s compassion that extends beyond human boundaries. A tax collector, whose work funded Roman occupation, would have been considered a traitor among patriotic Jews. The disease suffered by

the woman left her ritually unclean, separated from worship and community (see Leviticus 15:25, 27). Anyone who came into contact with her would share that separation. Young girls held little value in the society of that day. Beyond that, according to Numbers 19:11, her death rendered anyone who touched her unclean. Yet Jesus sits at table with Matthew, honours the touch of the woman and her great faith, and takes the little girl by the hand to enjoy new life.

In these instances, Jesus’ words and actions speak invitation and enact restoration. In following Jesus, Matthew finds new life in the community of disciples. The woman is restored to wholeness and the possibility of returning to her community. The young girl is restored to family.

The psalmist calls God’s people to sing a “new song” in **Psalm 33:1–12**. The response to God’s trustworthy word and saving work is praise.

God’s call and faithful human response find parallel treatments in **Genesis 12:1–9** and **Romans 4:13–25**. Genesis narrates God’s call to Abram (later called Abraham), and the journey of Abram and Sarai (later called Sarah) in response. The Romans text revisits the story of Abraham, identifying that trust in such promises involves “hoping against hope.”



Abundant compassion and surprising restoration fill the stories of God’s people. Call and response, promise and journey, trust and hope mark the lives of all who would follow God’s leading. Consider your own life and community. What does it mean to have such faith in God’s power to restore? What makes it difficult or easy to journey in faith as you respond to God’s call?

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