

2nd Sunday after Pentecost – Year C
Lutheran, Radcliff, KY
Luke 7:1-10
Pastor Paul Horn

June 6, 2010

Faith

Approach Jesus in prayer

- I. With great humility
- II. With great faith

When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. ³ The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵ because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." ⁶ So Jesus went with them.

He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

⁹ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." ¹⁰ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

Blessed are the poor in the spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God... you are the salt and light of the earth... take the plank out of your own eye before you remove the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye... do not worry... love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... seek treasure in heaven. Do you remember what we typically call this event, when Jesus shared all of these dearly loved verses with his disciples? *The Sermon on the Mount*. It was in this sermon that Jesus also taught his disciples about prayer. He taught them the Lord's Prayer. He also instructed them, **"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."** And it is almost immediately after this sermon that the disciples see Jesus' teaching on faith and prayer put into action, by an unlikely individual.

After he came down from the mountain, the Teacher went into Capernaum, a village on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus made this town the headquarters of his ministry. Luke tells us that a Roman centurion lived in Capernaum. This centurion had a servant whom he valued highly. The servant was sick and about to die. Matthew's account of this story informs us that the servant was paralyzed and in terrible suffering (8:6). The centurion sent the elders of the Jews to Jesus, asking him to come and heal his servant. The elders went and found Jesus and pleaded earnestly with him saying, **"This man deserves to have you heal his servant. He loves our nation and has built our synagogue."**

What's wrong with this story? First of all, remember that the Roman government had military control over all of Palestine. Any Roman soldier or governor detested the thought of serving in Palestine. It was one of the most volatile areas in the Empire. The Jews were always rioting or

organizing attacks on Roman garrisons. A Roman centurion was an officer in command of 100 soldiers (Captain in charge of a company or a Troop commander). This centurion would have been in charge of a garrison in Capernaum, which was on the road to Damascus, making Capernaum a tax collecting center. The Jews hated tax collectors. They hated paying taxes to an emperor who thought of himself as a deity.

So why in the world would Jewish elders speak of someone in such glowing terms? Because this soldier was different. Unlike the majority of Roman soldiers, he loved the Jewish nation. He even used his own wealth to build the Jews of Capernaum a house of worship and education. Perhaps this officer had come to learn about the promise of a Savior. But what else is wrong with this story? This Roman centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant who was on the verge of death. Romans treated their slaves and servants like pieces of property. It was like buying a new horse. Your old horse is dying so you put him out of his misery and you go to the marketplace and bid on a new one. You did the same with slaves. But this centurion treated his servants as human beings. He was obviously touched by this illness and would do anything he could to help his servant.

After hearing the plea from the Jewish elders Jesus consented and started for the centurion's home. Obviously a runner came to the centurion with the news and before Jesus could reach the house another delegation approached the Teacher. The centurion sent some friends with this message, **"Lord, don't trouble yourself."** In his mind, the centurion had already troubled Jesus enough. **"I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you."** It was considered unclean for a Jew to enter the house of a Gentile. Perhaps the centurion knew this Old Testament law. More likely, he looked at his unworthiness, not from Christ's point of view, but his own, "I am unworthy, for I am a sinner. I am also a Gentile, from heathen people. It would not be proper for someone so great to come under the roof of one outside the Jewish family." It appalled him that Jesus would come to his home. He prayed with great humility. And now he prays with great faith...

"But say the word, and my servant will be healed." Jesus, you only have to say the command. I understand how this works. I myself receive orders and I carry them out. I give orders to my troop, and my men carry them out. Except your command has more power." The centurion believed Christ to be a man who had infinitely greater authority than any other man, since this authority involved snatching men out of the clutches of death - it must be divine authority. Jesus also had beings under him that had to obey his authority. In this case, the soldier who had to obey Christ's Word was disease and death. Diseases are not under the control of men as soldiers are.

Luke records for us that Jesus was amazed and said, **"No one in Israel have I found with such great faith."** Not among the priests that served in the temple, not among the Pharisees or the teachers of the law, not among the people of Capernaum, not even among his own disciples, had he found such great faith. Jesus was amazed because the Jews had many opportunities to hear Jesus' teachings and believe. They had the Scriptures which told the great acts of power by the LORD's hand, so that they could put their trust in God. They were the chosen nation to

receive the gift of the Savior and yet they still did not believe. But here this foreigner believes and has great faith in his Savior.

In Matthew's account he records, Mt 8.13 Jesus said, **"Go! It will be done just as you believed it would."** **And his servant was healed that very hour.** You know that when you feel on the verge of death, after the flu or a stomach virus, it takes a few days to come back to full strength. This man was healed completely... immediately.

The name of this story is "The Faith of the Centurion." Who is the main character of this story? Is it not Christ, whose divine presence and perfect holiness causes the centurion to stoop so low that he dares not appear before the Almighty God, because he recognizes that he is a sinner who deserves nothing from the Savior of the world? And at the same time, he has great faith. The object of great faith is Jesus. The soldier directs his faith to his Savior. Great faith dares to approach the Almighty God and put its firm trust and confidence in Jesus and believes that He will do whatever he promises in his Word.

You might be thinking, "Oh, that I had that faith!" You do! The problem comes in when you approach the throne room of God... is that you don't do it enough! You complain about your situation in life, "I'm stressed out about this, that or the other thing." But you're too stubborn to petition the Almighty God for assistance! Instead, in your great pride you choose to work it out yourself. How's that going for you? In our hymn "What a friend we have in Jesus," the writer says, "Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer." (CW 411:1) Once you figure out that this isn't working so well and you finally "get it" that you need to fully rely on God, and you finally let go and approach the Lord in humility, you don't believe he'll do what you ask.

James described this sinful attitude in our Second Lesson this morning, **"When he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."** I hear a lot of people, not just here at church, but in the community, complain about the government. Have you prayed for your president, senator, congressman in the last week, month, year? "But they're beyond help," you say. Really? God doesn't have the power to change nations? He's never done that before? I've heard people talk about unchurched family members or friends who they have invited to worship or Bible study, and someone will inevitably say, "Yeah, but they're beyond help. I don't think they'll ever come around." Really? You think the issue is that that they won't change, but the problem is that you doubt that God's Word is not capable of turning their life around. We fall into the same lack of faith with our prayers for the building project, with surgeries and diseases, with personal finances, with relationships... too often we fail to trust that God has the power and the willingness to do anything about it.

As I studied this story this week, the one statement made by the centurion that still fascinates me, **"Don't trouble yourself, Lord. Just say the Word."** Don't bother coming here under my roof. I'm not worthy. Your Word has sufficient power. What's ironic is that Jesus found it pure

joy to trouble himself. With great humility he came down from heaven to earth. God took on human flesh, to live among unworthy creatures who had disobeyed him. It was Jesus who said, **“I did not come to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many.”** He submitted to his Father’s will that he would be the one to rescue these unworthy creatures who had gotten themselves into this mess of sin and it’s consequences of death and eternal suffering. Jesus had healed the servant and set him free from his suffering and pain and snatched him from death’s jaws. He willingly gave up his life as a ransom, as the payment, to snatch you from the jaws of death, hell, and Satan, paying the price for your sins of doubt, of pride and failure to trust, costly sins, that would only continue to enslave us. But Jesus has set you free by his life and death. Just by saying the Word, he caused you to believe that the price has been paid for you. Just by saying the Word, his body and blood are truly present in this sacrament to reassure you that this was the price paid to set you free from your sins. By the Word, this water granted you the freedom of eternal life.

How can we not be moved to fall on our knees in great humility before our Almighty God! How can we not, in great faith, now approach his throne with such confidence, knowing and believing that since he did this all for me, will he not also along with my ransom, give me what I need, will he not also listen to my plea, how can we not also believe that he will do what he has promised, “Whatever you ask in my name, my Father will do it.” “Ask and it will be given...” We most certainly will. We will approach the throne of God with great humility. We will approach the throne of God with great faith and we will believe that he will do it. And he will. For he has promised it. Amen.