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St Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th St. SW
Austin, MN, 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
sermon preached on-
June 2, 2013
2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Kings 8:22-23, 41-43; Galatians 1:1-10
Hymns: 38; 753; 457; 428; 644

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Luke 7:1-10

Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum. 2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. 3 So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. 4 And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, 5 "for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue." 6 Then Jesus went with them. And when He was already not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to Him, saying to Him, "Lord, do not trouble Yourself, for I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof. 7 Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8 For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 9 When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in

Israel!” 10 And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God
Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, fellow Redeemed

INTRO: Jesus Commends Genuine Faith.

One of the outstanding aspects of this text is what Jesus says to the crowd that surrounded Him that day. He addresses the people concerning the faith of a **Roman Centurion!** He speaks of the Roman soldier's faith with words that any of us would cherish. Jesus held up this foreigner as an example of great faith before the citizens of Jesus' adopted home town, the same town which several of His disciples called home. Jesus declared of this Roman's faith: **“I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!”** So then let us examine the circumstances which the Holy Spirit reveals that led to this wondrous commendation, highlighting the --

Theme: Centurion of Capernaum as an Example of Genuine Faith.

Of course it is noteworthy in and of itself that this Roman turned to Jesus in time of need. He sent some of the local Jewish elders that they might approach Jesus on the centurion's behalf and present his request to the Lord. What the Spirit revealed in these circumstances is that the Centurion possessed -

I. A Fruitful Faith.

Luke 7:2-5 “And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die. 3 So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant. 4 And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving, 5 “for he loves our nation, and has built us a synagogue.”

The first fruit of faith that is evident in this Roman is his loving concern for this servant. The simple fact that he actually cared for a lowly servant who served in his house was a fruit of faith. Yes, unbelievers may also love their household staff, but this can be seen as a fruit of faith because it engenders something more than simple concern. He truly desired the health and wellbeing of his servant, and he turned to Jesus for help in time of need. That is a fruit of faith, he heard of Jesus and turned to Jesus for the good of his servant.

That is a lesson that we need to learn, a connection that is vital to our understanding of faith and our relationship to the Lord. Outward appearances are often similar when one looks at the actions of the believing child of God and the unbeliever. There is a civic righteousness in the world that can be seen and judged by others as common decency. And yet the Lord looks at the heart. The Lord sees what others may not always be able to ascertain. So often people, even when attributing altruistic motivations to their actions or the actions of others, will conclude that doing the kind deed made them feel good about themselves. That is a very telling statement. So often when people behave in a kind and loving way they find merit in their actions, and a hope for return for their actions. That then is not longer altruistic, but selfish. We love because God loved us, and sent His Son to be our Savior from sin and death. We love to show and share the love of God for all of humanity.

This was the genuine altruistic love that is seen in the actions of the centurion. It is noteworthy in his attitude toward his servant, but also attributed to his attitude toward the Jewish people under him. Generally the Romans despised the Jewish people and regarded them as a conquered rabble, and troublemakers. The centurion of Capernaum did not behave in a heartless or cruel manner toward the people of Capernaum. He was credited with love toward the people. He did not claim this for himself, but this love attributed to him by the Jewish elders of Capernaum who represented the centurion before Jesus. They pointed out that he went so far as to build them a new synagogue! The centurion, who would have been expected to be a worshiper of the many gods of Rome, and one to hold the gods of a

conquered people in disdain, gave evidence of the regard that he held for the true God by providing the town with a place for worship.

The genuine faith of this Roman centurion was seen by the people around him in his fruits of faith. Indeed, it was noted and respected by the local Jewish elders who held most gentiles, even proselytes to the Jewish faith, in low regard. They were ready to praise the centurion before Jesus, encouraging the Lord to favorably regard the centurion's petition. But this boasting was not prompted by the centurion, for the evidence is very clear that his was --

II. A Humble Faith.

The Jews that approached Jesus on the centurion's behalf begged Jesus to respond favorably to the man's prayer because they were so sure that he was deserving. This judgment was based on those deeds and qualities which we have already discussed: the Centurion's love for the people, and that he had built that synagogue for them.

However deserving the Jewish leaders in Capernaum thought this man to be, he did not see it that way. What is evident in the Roman's faith is humility. He characterized himself as being **unworthy** rather than deserving. He did not think of himself as even being worthy to be in Jesus' presence, much less to have Jesus actually come into his home and enter under his roof. Some speculate that the cause for this man's concern was that he understood that Jews were not to enter into the home of a gentile, for that would make them ceremonially unclean. That could have caused Jesus considerable inconvenience if Jesus had actually entered the man's home to minister to him and his servant. That may be part of the consideration, but that is not the Spirit's emphasis for our instruction.

The Spirit's emphasis is simply the man's own sense of humility. The centurion realized that he was not worthy of having Jesus come and enter his home. A Roman centurion was a man of significant importance in the ranks of the Roman army, and one stationed in a town like Capernaum would have easily

been the most important representative of Rome in that town. He had both power and prestige in the community, as well as among the Roman citizens.

However, that didn't matter in this circumstance. He realized that Jesus was someone far more important than he was. He realized that Jesus was someone to whom he should submit. Indeed this Roman did have a true and genuine faith in Jesus. He must have believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah he had learned of in the Jewish rabbis. He knew that this Jesus was His Lord and indeed his Savior. He humbled himself before the Lord.

How important it is for us to grasp this lesson regarding faith. Our standing before the Lord is not **because** of who we are in the world, but **in spite** of who we are in the world. It is not our power, or prestige, or merit found in deeds that we have done that makes us worthy before the Lord. Indeed we do well to confess our own UNworthiness often before the Lord. The cause for us having any standing before the Lord is found in Him, in Jesus' merit and in His grace. It is because we are counted as children of God by our Father in heaven that we have access through faith to this grace in which we stand. We are not worthy of entertaining the Lord's glorious presence in our homes any more than the centurion was. We need to confess with Jacob as he reviewed his life before the Lord, "**I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant**" (Genesis 32:10). Indeed we are not worthy, and we confess we are not worthy, and yet the Lord reveals His saving truth to us and calls us His children, and deals with us mercifully in love.

It was this grace and mercy that is found in our Lord Jesus that led this centurion to possess --

III. A Confident Faith.

Humility of faith did not preclude a confident faith. The inspired record of our text reveals the centurion's confidence of faith and the source of that confidence. The Centurion said:

Luke 7:7-8 “I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8 For I also am a man placed under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

The centurion understood authority. He had people under his authority. When he spoke people paid attention. When he said, “Jump,” the people under his authority would reply “How high?” He understood the authority of the verbal command better than others. He also clearly understood that when Jesus spoke His holy will, whatever Jesus desired was done. Jesus’ word and will was (and remains) a power that could not be denied. The centurion was fully confident that when Jesus commanded, the centurion’s servant would be healed. He knew it wasn’t necessary for Jesus to come to the centurion’s house to accomplish what Jesus desired.

Do we understand the authority of Jesus’ word? Do we comprehend that all of Scripture is the Word of our Lord, and possesses His authority. Jesus said, “**The Scripture cannot be broken**”(John 10:35). Jesus declared, “**Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away**”(Luke 21:33). The devil would tempt us to doubt the accuracy and the authority, and the power of the Word of the Lord. The world would have us believe that the Bible is just another book written by fallible and even ignorant men, and if we pay attention to the words of this book we are falling victim to the superstitions of others, or the hyperbole of enthusiasts. What we need to understand, what the Spirit of God leads us to know, is that it isn’t only the words printed in red that are the words of the Lord. All Scripture is the Word of the Lord. All Scripture has the authority of our Lord behind it. When the Lord assures us that our sins are forgiven, **our sins ARE forgiven!** When the **Lord says** that we shall rise again on the last day, **we shall rise.** When He comes on the last day and commands our bodies to rise from the grave, it will be His authority, the authority of His Word that shall cause our bodies to come forth from our graves. Such is the power of Jesus’ Word. You can count on it! Know this! Believe that the Lord’s will is done, and His will is good and gracious toward us!

Genuine faith -- that was what was seen in the centurion of Capernaum. Genuine faith is what the Spirit of our God has worked in our hearts. And yet we pray, "Lord give us such a faith that loves even as Jesus loved us, that is humble before the Lord realizing that only the merit of Jesus saves, and yet is confident to lay hold of the Lord's words, not doubting, but firmly believing that what Jesus says, what He promises us regarding life and salvation shall surely come to pass."

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.