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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
January 24, 2016
3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Scripture Lessons: Exodus 3:1-6, 1 Peter 1:3-21

Hymns: 364; 360; 428; 399:2,3 (238:3-5)

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*.”

⁹When 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!” ¹⁰And 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, God my Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: A Weak Faith in a Strong Savior

Our text today is well known for the example of faith that is seen in the Roman Centurion. After all, it is very remarkable for Jesus to take note of an individual’s faith. And for Jesus to call attention to this man’s faith in such a bold and public manner would lead one to believe that this must be the focus of our meditation. And without doubt we will be talking about the faith of this Roman and how it stood out as an example for us.

However, it is good for us to keep things in perspective. I saw an item once in which one individual was commenting on another’s Christian’s faith, and how admirable and strong that individual’s faith was. The response was notable because this second individual denied that she had a strong faith. She rather confessed that she had a weak faith in a strong Savior. And that is actually the lesson the Spirit would teach us today as we see --

THEME: The Centurion Demonstrate How Faith

Comprehends the Glory of Christ.

I. Faith turns to Jesus in time of Need.

Jesus was on the move following the presentation of the Sermon on the Mount. Our text begins with this update:

Luke 7:1-3 “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.”

Capernaum was a small city of Galilee. It became Jesus’ adopted hometown when He moved His mother from Nazareth to Capernaum. It was notable enough of a town that it merited a division of Roman soldiers to be stationed there. It is at this point that things begin to become rather extraordinary, and it is the centurion in charge of this Roman garrison that is the center of attention. One might even find it notable that this centurion cared about his servant, but then one might become attached to servant who as a close attendant. When this man’s servant became ill and it was apparent that the servant’s life was in danger the centurion turned to this man called Jesus, about whom he had received word.

What had he heard? Well it certainly included the fact that Jesus had healed many people. It was only a day or so earlier that Jesus had healed many people on the same occasion that He had presented that notable Sermon on the Mount. Reports of large crowds gathering in the district for any reason would have been delivered to the

head of the city garrison, and that report would have included that Jesus was performing miracles of healing. Romans were a superstitious people with many gods supposedly having a son or daughter sent down to earth for one or another reason. After all, Satan does like to mimic the truth to cover his lies and deceptions. So perhaps one might assume that the centurion was basing his hope for deliverance for his servant on the superstitions learned in his youth. That was not the case!

We do take note that he did not come himself to see Jesus but sent elders from the local synagogue. Was this because he was too busy? Was it that he wouldn't demean himself to come personally to seek help from a Jew? Time will tell. But why would Jesus pay attention to the requests of a Roman? Was it because the elders of the city gave Jesus good reason? They reported to Jesus:

Luke 7:4-5 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.’”

They were happy to plead this man's cause with Jesus because he was the exception to the rule. This Roman centurion actually cared about the Jewish people and had gone so far in his kindness toward them that he had built them a new synagogue! They must have been pleased that Jesus saw the merit in their case and was accompanying them to the centurion's home. But Jesus knows all things, and we shouldn't be misled into their thinking that one must, or even can merit the Lord's attention by one's good and kind deeds.

What is important up to this point is the understanding of the centurion that Jesus is the one to whom one must turn in time of need.

Faith turns to Jesus in time of need! That is what the Spirit would have us see in the Centurion. He had heard about Jesus, and in faith he turned to Jesus for help in time of need. There was no bartering in the centurion's mind. There was no pride in the centurion's heart that he refused to demean himself to come personally before Jesus. There was **faith** that Jesus could heal his servant and save his servant's life. That is what we also need to comprehend about Jesus. He is there to help in time of need. Jesus cares. He hears our cry for help and Jesus responds. Jesus is able to help us in all things.

Faith comprehends this because true and saving faith is informed by the gospel. Spirit given faith knows that it is not for this life only that we have hope in Jesus. It is not for the distress of this life alone with its trials and sicknesses that we need help from Jesus. Faith understands that our greatest difficulty is spiritual not physical or material. Our greatest problem which is way beyond our ability to address in any way, is our sin with the corruption and curse that it brings upon us all. And yet God sent His Son into this world to deliver us from this seemingly impossible situation of being lost and condemned. He delivered us with an impossibly wondrous love that is revealed in Jesus. Jesus' glory is revealed to us in the hope Jesus' resurrection from the dead brings us, giving us the living hope of everlasting life. And so faith turns to Jesus in time of need.

This great salvation reveals the depth of Jesus care for you in all your ways, and it reveals that Jesus is fully capable to deliver us from all our distress.

However the Centurion teaches us even more, that --

II. Faith Trusts Jesus' Power and Authority.

Luke 7:6-8 “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. ⁷Therefore I did not even think myself worthy to come to You. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸For 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 was confident in his faith toward Jesus but he was not presumptuous. Indeed, he demonstrates great humility. He sends friends to Jesus when the Lord is nearing his house. He declares that he is not worthy for Jesus to come into his house. The centurion understood the difficulty that could arise for Jesus if Jesus had actually visited the man's house. It was not lawful for the Jews to enter a gentile's home, and for that gentile to be the Roman centurion who represented the nation's oppressor could make it even worse.

The centurion understood by faith that it was not necessary for Jesus to come into his home to help him. The centurion understood authority. He was a man who possessed authority that was given to him from his superiors. As a result of that authority when he gave a command it was obeyed. By faith the centurion

understood the authority which Jesus possessed, an authority given to Him from above and so the Centurion was confident that Jesus only need “say the word, and my servant will be healed” (v.7).

This confession revealed the nature and certainty of the centurion’s faith. It revealed that the centurion understood that Jesus was the Son of God, and that His authority was absolute. And so in his confession the centurion testified to the glory of Christ better than Jesus’ own countrymen. This is what prompted Jesus’ response.

Luke 7:9-10 “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.”

Faith in Jesus is not put to shame. The centurion’s faith was not disappointed. By the power of Jesus his servant was made well.

This lesson is there for us also. It is not in our worthiness that we find our confidence. It is in the power and authority of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. He who can do all things; He cares for you! In all your ways He watches over you, and keeps you in His loving care. Jesus continues to hear us in our prayers, and in our hour of need God, our Savior is faithful to deliver us from every evil. It may not always be how we imagined it would be, but the Lord does deliver, and the Lord does comfort, and the Lord is our hope unto eternal life. We shall receive the salvation of our souls. All this comes to us because of the power and authority of Him who gave

Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God. May the Spirit open our hearts to believe that we may have such a faith as the Centurion of Capernaum.

“Oh for a faith that will shrink
Tho’ pressed by many a foe;
That will not tremble on the brink
Of poverty or woe.

“That will not murmur nor complain
Beneath the chast’ning rod
But in the hour of grief or pain
Can lean upon its God.

“Lord, give us such a faith as this;
And then, whate’er may come,
We’ll taste e’en now the hallowed bliss
Of an eternal home.”

(TLH 396:1, 2, 6)

AMEN.

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