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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Second Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 4C)

May 29, 2016

Text: Luke 7:1–10

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

It is providential that the Gospel reading appointed for today, the Sunday before Memorial Day, focuses on the faith and good works of a soldier. Tomorrow, we will pause and remember those men and women who not only served our country in the armed services but also gave their lives in sacrifice for her defense and prosperity. This is a noble time of remembrance given in honor of a noble vocation. Thanks be to God that we live in a free country. May we, the living, receive such a precious gift with thanksgiving and live lives of faithfulness which gives due homage to the sacrifices rendered on our behalf.

The Roman centurion we read about in Luke 7 was one of the many thousands of centurions in the Roman army. They were the backbone of a powerful empire. Through them and the soldiers they commanded, Rome had conquered many nations, including the Israel. We don't know this centurion's name, where he was from, or anything about his life history except that he's a foreign soldier stationed in a conquered territory. He was in Capernaum because his superiors ordered him to be there. It's that simple.

This was no easy task. In general, the Jews despised the Romans. First century Jews longed for their freedom, understandably so. They longed for the days of King David and independence. The Romans were pagan Gentiles who exacted taxes, enforced strange laws, and worshipped false idols.

This is what makes the centurion of Luke 7 all the more remarkable. He was loved and respected by the Jews. Jewish leaders go to Jesus on the centurion's behalf and tell the Lord, "He (i.e., the centurion) is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue" (vs. 4–5). This soldier is "worthy," Jesus. High praise indeed coming from Jews!

This believing centurion saw that the Capernaum Jews needed a place to worship; he needed a place to worship. He had the monetary resources. His love for the Lord and

his neighbor moved him to pay for the construction of a synagogue, a public place to worship the Lord of heaven and earth. This man lived out his faith in obedience to God and in love toward his neighbor.

And we mustn't forget the centurion's love for his dying servant (vs. 2–3). He asks the Jewish elders to see if Jesus will come and heal his beloved servant. This man's public life and private life were lived in obedience to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Or to use words the apostle Paul would write later in Galatians 5:6, "Faith working through love."

This centurion becomes an example of true Christian faith and piety, one that we should strive to emulate. The Lord Jesus says of this centurion's faith, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (vs. 9). Among Jesus' 12 disciples, among the nation of Israel, faith like this foreigner could not be found. Jesus marvels (vs. 9). And we ought to take note and pray to the Lord of all nations to build within each of us the faith of this Roman centurion. So that we might seek this faith rightly, let me highlight a few notable things about this centurion's faith, about Christian faith.

The Jews told Jesus that the centurion was "worthy" (vs. 4) to have his dying servant healed. They mention his good deeds. But when Jesus is near to the centurion's house, he sends friends to Jesus saying the exact opposite of what the Jews said. "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof" (vs. 6). Christian faith does not keep a record of good works; it doesn't concern itself with self-made worthiness.

No matter how many good works a believer does – build churches, say prayers, give to the poor, fast, love family, friends, and neighbors in thought, word, and deed – without Jesus and His love and forgiveness everything in us is contaminated with sin. In the truest sense, we are unworthy. But Christian faith hears the promise of righteousness given as a gift through Christ Jesus and clings to that alone. We Christians are made worthy because of Jesus.

Good works do not make us worthy. Instead, through the Gospel of Word and Sacraments, God declares us worthy so that we are then able to do good works as a fruit of faith. The good work of children loving and honoring their parents, of parents loving and raising their children, of spouses devoting themselves to each other, of citizens honoring lawful civil government, of neighbor helping neighbor in his time of need, of hearing God's Word with prayer and thanksgiving, all these things and so

much more are good works given to you by God in and through Jesus. The Christian, in faith, receives these works as gifts, does them with little or no notice, and rejoices that God has created, redeemed, and sanctified him or her for such purposes. It is no over simplification to say that Christian spirituality is the fulfilling of your various God-given vocations and daily callings in faith. Such was the faith of a Roman centurion.

Note too that the centurion rightly understood the authority and power of Jesus' word. That too is a characteristic of Christian faith. Return back to vs. 7b–8. The friends of the centurion say these words to Jesus on his behalf, "But say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with 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 knew the power and authority of words. When he exercised his authority appropriately, things happened. When any of his 100 men heard him speak, they acted accordingly. He was a man of authority.

So the centurion believed that Jesus had the authority to heal his servant, even at a distance. All Jesus need do is speak His authoritative word and things will happen accordingly. It's this aspect of the centurion's faith that causes Jesus to marvel. No one else in Israel had this depth of faith in God's Word and love. And by the power of Jesus Word, the servant was healed (vs. 10).

On this side of Good Friday and Easter, we know and believe that Jesus' authoritative word of grace and healing flows from His death and resurrection. By Jesus' stripes we are healed. To Calvary, Jesus carried our iniquities and nailed them to His cross. In His resurrection, we are justified and declared righteous before God the Father. The accusing voice of Satan and the Law is silenced for Jesus has spoken once and for all, "Father, forgive them" and "It is finished." Moments before His ascension to the Father's right hand, Jesus declares, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me..." (Matt. 28:18).

Jesus too is a man under authority; the authority of His heavenly Father. When Jesus says to your sins "Go" they go away. When He says to any person "Come" that person comes to faith and salvation. The Lord Jesus speaks authoritatively and what He says happens exactly as He says it. And yes Jesus does continue to speak authoritatively to this day through His Word and Sacraments. In the very next verse after saying "all authority has been given to me..." Jesus says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" through baptism in God's name and through teaching

them all that I have commanded (Matt. 28:19). The only authorized means of making Christian disciples is through Trinitarian baptism and Biblical teaching. Anything else, does not have Jesus' authority behind it. Anything else does not create Christians!!

Dear saints of God, take heart and courage at the authoritative word of Jesus. When He says, "You are forgiven"; you are made new and righteous." When He says, "Come to me"; you are adopted into His holy family. When He says, "I have come that you might be free indeed"; you are set free from the domination of sin, death, and the devil. When He says, "I am with you always to the end of the age"; you are made living temples of His Spirit. Know this, when Jesus speaks His authoritative word, those things happen.

And we wait for Him to speak on the Last Day when He will call forth the dead from their graves. And through His Word, His people will be resurrected unto eternal life. And then we will hear some of the sweetest words of eternity, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter into the paradise prepared for you before the foundations of the earth!" When Jesus speaks, it is done!! Thanks be to God.

A Roman centurion believed in the power of Jesus' words. May Christ create such faith and confidence in us through His authoritative Word.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.