

Second Sunday after Pentecost  
May 29, 2016  
St. Luke 7:1-10  
The Faith Jesus Calls Great  
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Dear Friends in Christ,

Faith is a topic of interest and discussion for us. What is faith? How does one obtain faith? What good is faith? For orthodox Lutheran Christians, faith is one of the three great "solae" along with grace and Scripture.

King Solomon expressed faith when he dedicated the first Temple, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above and on earth below-you keep your covenant of love with your servants who continue wholeheartedly in your way." The apostle Paul confessed his faith to the Galatians about Christ "who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age."

Our Savior, Jesus, saw faith where we might not expect to find it at that time; in a Gentile Centurion of the Roman legion. The Holy Spirit creates faith wherever he pleases completely apart from human qualifications or abilities. Jesus even referred to the Centurion's faith as "such great faith."

**The Faith Jesus Calls Great.** Is the faith that humbly places itself under Christ's authority. And, is the faith that fully expects God to act in his power.

The Roman Centurion's faith recognized and acknowledged Jesus' absolute authority. Our Savior expressed that authority with his Word. The Centurion submitted to Jesus' authority just as he was used to having men under him submit to his authority, and as he submitted to his superiors. Such great faith is to characterize us as we submit to God's Word, and oppose those who do not.

In his situation, this was a completely reasonable argument for trusting in Jesus. Reason is the adversary of faith only when reason knocks faith aside to take its place. I used my reason to write this sermon in an understandable form. You use your reason to comprehend and apply the sermon. The Holy Spirit enables us to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ, to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God."

The constant adversary and obstacle to faith is pride. Pride is the unwillingness to acknowledge any authority except self. Thus I will deny or ignore others' words. Were we satisfied with our parents' authoritative argument for our obedience, "Because we say so?" That is reason enough. We do not need any other reason to obey God than his absolute authority over us. Faith humbly places itself under Christ's authority. Wise Solomon also wrote about this in Proverbs 16:18. "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

This Gentile Centurion fixed his faith on Jesus to help his valuable servant who was "sick and about to die." This battle hardened veteran needed somebody with some authority. He heard about Jesus. He was a man who got along well with the people he was occupying and sent some elders to ask Jesus for help. These elders spoke up for him. Interestingly, they offered the exact argument the Centurion made later. He said, "I do not deserve to have you come under my roof." The elders told Jesus, "This man deserves to have you do this because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."

Spirit wrought humility filled this heart in one of the Gentile sheep Jesus said were not of this sheep pen. The faith Jesus calls great humbly places itself under Jesus' authority. Jesus would bring the Centurion in as he listened to the Good Shepherd's voice to become part of the one flock with that one shepherd. Jesus voice calls us.

In contrition and faith, we humbly place ourselves under his authority-the authority that enabled the Son of God and Son of Man to lay down his life for us on the cross, and the authority to take it upon again in the resurrection from the dead.

The faith Jesus calls great looks beyond authority to act. It sees the ability to act. It has the expectation of action. The faith Jesus calls great fully expects God to act in his power.

The Centurion told Jesus not to trouble himself and travel to the man's home because he did not deserve the Lord's presence there. He did ask Jesus to heal his servant. "But say the word, and my servant will be healed." This is not a wish like "if you say the word" but an imperative, "say the word.

The Centurion did not see his dying servant as too far gone for Jesus to do anything. There was no doubt, no hesitancy that Jesus would be compassionate.

We note here the faith of this Gentile as compared to dear Mary and Martha. They both knew Jesus could do something for their dead brother, Lazarus after Jesus arrived in Bethany. Yet in weakness of faith both thought Jesus should have been present during Lazarus' illness. Both told their Lord, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." [John 11] We may apply Jesus' words "I have not found such great faith even in Israel" to those sisters. The Roman trusted it was not Jesus' presence that had the power but his Word.

This is what the faith Jesus calls great does. It relies on Jesus' power in his Word. It does not make excuses, or apply conditions. It sees that things never have gone too far and trusts the Savior's intervention to take care of things even when humanly speaking they appear hopeless. Hopeless is not a word we ever consider or use in connection with Christ's Word and its power.

We rely on the power of God's Word. The Word of Christ is the Word of God. With Samuel we say, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." [1 Samuel 3:10] With Peter we say, "Master, we have worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the net." [St. Luke 5:5] With Paul we say, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." [Philippians 4:13]

God the Father promises his power to us in prayer for Jesus' sake. The Holy Spirit gives us power in the means of grace, the Word alone and connected to visible elements. It will be so for us because God acts in his power.

Hear again the result of the Centurion's great faith; great because its object was the powerful Christ. "Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well." The power of Christ's Word heals the sick, raises the dead, drives out evil spirits. The power of Christ says to the paralytic and to us, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven." [St. Matthew 9:2]

Only Jesus could know the Centurion's faith as greater than any he had seen in Israel because only Jesus can see into hearts. What a faith to nurture in our own hearts through the Word of God. What faith to humbly go to Jesus in simple trust, "But say the word." Not my word or will be done. But yours. We know God will grant the urgent needs of our bodies and souls. He has the authority. He has the power. He has the love for us in every need. Amen. <SDG>