

# SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

## Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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### What Makes a Great Faith?

#### Luke 7:1-10

When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.<sup>2</sup> There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.<sup>3</sup> The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.<sup>4</sup> When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this,<sup>5</sup> because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue."<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed."<sup>8</sup> 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."<sup>9</sup> 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."<sup>10</sup> Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

It feels good to receive a compliment. It is nice to hear someone say, "Good job. Well done." It feels even better to receive a compliment from someone you really respect. Imagine receiving a compliment from the Lord Jesus himself. There is really nothing that could beat that is there? In our reading today, we see Jesus pay the centurion a very high compliment when he says, "*I tell you I have not found such a great faith even in Israel.*" To have Jesus say something like that is truly extraordinary. It makes you pay close attention. You would love to hear words like that spoken about you, wouldn't you? But how—how can you demonstrate a faith like the centurion's, which was worthy of Jesus' high praise? Let's look closely at our reading so we can find the answer to this question: what makes such a great faith?

We learn some important facts about the centurion in the first few verses of our reading. Luke records, "*When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.*"<sup>2</sup> *There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die.*<sup>3</sup> *The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.*" The first thing we learn is that the man is a centurion. The name centurion means that he was an officer in the Roman army, who had a hundred men under his command. From this, we also learn that the man is a Gentile. There were no Jews who held positions of authority in the Roman army. We also learn that this centurion cared about a certain servant who had become very ill and was near to death. He cared about him so much that he sent some Jewish elders to go to Jesus and ask him to heal the servant.

This action of sending elders to Jesus tells us something very important about the faith of the centurion. It does so especially when we realize why he sent those elders to Jesus and did not go himself. Later in the text we hear the centurion say, "*I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.*" With these words, we quickly realize that the centurion showed a great amount of humility. He did not think that he had any right to demand something of Jesus. No, he did not even consider himself worthy to speak with Jesus in person. This is especially striking when we see that he could have pointed out several reasons why he deserved an audience with Jesus. We know this because the Jewish elders pointed these reasons out for him. They said, "*This man deserves to have you do this,*"<sup>5</sup> *because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.*" His treatment of the Jewish people and his aid in building their synagogue were fruits of his faith, but they were not something about which he bragged. That is the first thing that made this centurion's faith so great. It was a humble faith—a faith that showed itself in his actions and not by his boasting.

This is the kind of faith that you and I also strive for—one filled with humility. Unfortunately, we often fall short of perfect humility. It is a trick of the devil when he turns the fruits of our faith—our good works—into reasons for boasting. When we do something good for the Lord—when we put in hours of service or take a stand for his name—we are tempted to think that these good deeds earn us a special status before God. We are tempted to think that God

owes us one for the things that we have done for him. It is even worse when we let that kind of thinking give itself voice and we boast about our good deeds to others—as though our pious actions make us better people.

When we fall into such prideful boasting, we need to be humbled. There is no better way to be humbled than by looking into God's law. It doesn't take too long when reviewing God's commandments to realize that even our best actions are tainted with sin. We know that we don't deserve anything from God. It is only because of his grace that we can stand before him. It is only because he loved us so much that he sent his Son to die for us that we are worthy to be called his children. A quick review of our sin and God's grace leads us to profound humility. What is truly beautiful is when that humble faith leads to acts of service. That is what happened in the life of the centurion and I pray that that kind of faith displays itself among us as well.

There is another component to the faith of the centurion that makes it great. It isn't just his humility. This can be seen when we look at the rest of his quote which we started to look at earlier. He said to Jesus, "*Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.<sup>7</sup> That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.*" These last words show that this centurion had a great confidence in Jesus' ability to help. He used an example to illustrate his confidence in Jesus' words. He said, "*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.*" He knew that, as a commander, his soldiers and his servants listened to his commands and carried them out because he spoke with authority. He also knew that Jesus had a much greater authority than he did. His authority was an earthly one—Jesus had authority from on high. The centurion believed that whatever command Jesus gave, it would be carried out, no matter how seemingly impossible.

Jesus' actions showed that the centurion's confidence was well-placed. When the servants, who had been sent to Jesus, returned to the centurion's house, they found that the man had been healed. This was clearly a miracle. This was something that only the Son of God could do. This was yet another reason for the centurion to put his faith and trust in Jesus.

We, too, can have confidence in Jesus' power to help us. That is the second component to a great faith. It is a faith that trusts Jesus' power and does not doubt. This is not always easy. Situations come up in our lives where it seems as though Jesus is powerless. We pray and pray for his aid, but it is slow in arriving or, from our perspective, it doesn't come at all. We are quick to doubt and to worry in such a situation.

When that happens, we need to look again to Jesus and realize why we have such confidence. We need to see that he does speak with authority and he does have the power to rescue us. He showed that time and time again when he walked on this earth. But he shows his authority in the most profound way when he says, "Your sins are forgiven." Sometimes, when we are looking so intently for Jesus to help us with our day-to-day troubles, we forget that he has already provided the greatest rescue of all by saving us from sin, death and the devil. There is nothing greater than to hear Jesus' words on the cross, "*It is finished,*" because those words were spoken with such authority. Those words mean that our salvation is complete. We don't have to doubt where we are headed for eternity. We can be filled with confidence.

We can also have confidence that Jesus will come to help us in those situations that might seem hopeless. He will help us in the best way possible. Sometimes that means using his power to bring healing or change the situation in a way we never thought possible. Sometimes it means that Jesus uses his authority to allow our troubles to continue and, by them, to teach us, train us and draw us closer to him. But through it all, we have no reason to doubt. Jesus keeps every one of his promises and he will keep his Word to us as well.

In the end, this is what makes a great faith: we know that we have a great Savior! It is his great undeserved love for us that leads us to humility and acts of service. It is his great power and authority that leads us to put our faith in him with absolute confidence. May God continue to lead us into deeper humility and greater confidence as we fix our eyes on the perfect love of our great Savior. **Amen.**