

## **Luke 7:1-10**

*After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. For I also 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 slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.*

I wonder what it was like on that road where Jesus was in our passage from Luke this morning? He was in, or around, Capernaum making his way to the aid of a centurion. Really it was more to the aid of the centurion's servant, but either way it doesn't matter. Walking along with him were the important officials, the elders of Capernaum, who had approached him on the Centurion's behalf. I mean, after all, they had been the ones who had come and asked for a healing and so now, in response to their request, Jesus had started towards the place where the person needing healing was. Certainly they would have been going along, don't you think? Something was in the works. They surely had heard stories about Jesus. They weren't going to miss it, whatever "it" might end up being. They, and arguably a growing number of people, were going along to see what *might* happen.

Along the way, friends of the Centurion came and stopped Jesus explaining to him that the Centurion knows that he is not worthy to have Jesus come into his house so, please, he doesn't need to trouble himself. They also explained that the Centurion understood the bigger picture, the bigger picture of authority, and that if Jesus would just say the word, if he would just think the thought, he knew that his servant would be healed. It was a great act of faith on the part of the Centurion.

I imagine that the crowd held their breath in anticipation. What would Jesus do now? Would he go or would he abandon the task at hand? Would they get to see something happen with their own eyes or would they never know whether a healing would have, could have, taken place?

One theologian once wrote that there was only two times that Jesus was dumbfounded in his dealings with his brother and sister Jews. Once was in Nazareth when he was amazed at their unbelief. You remember that story, I'm sure. Their unbelief created a separation between them and God so that Jesus' miraculous works were unable to be received. The second was this time in Capernaum when he marveled at this gentile who had more faith than anyone he had encountered in all of Israel.

Faith is hard for us. Humans are such concrete creatures. Maybe it is because trust is so hard for us. Maybe that is one of the negative effects of the fall. We live by the notion that seeing is believing and although we give acknowledgement to the concept of faith, we still are coming along hoping for the opportunity to see for ourselves. Paul saw that in us. That is why he wrote to the church in Corinth, when they were being distracted by others who had their own message to sell, that they should not be deceived. And that "deceived" part weighs on our trust. They should be people, followers of Christ, who walked by faith not by sight.

But what does that look like? What does it mean to walk by faith for such concrete creatures?

In one sermon I once heard, faith was described as "An action that we take based on a trust that has been developed." An action that we take based on a trust that has been developed.

Let's use the example of Peter walking on the water. Jesus comes to the boat walking on the water and encounters a pretty confused bunch of disciples. Jesus sees their fear and he identifies himself and tells them that they don't need to be afraid.

Peter responds. First he tests his assumptions (Jesus, if that is you) and then he asks for the invite on to the water himself.

Jesus does invite him. He invites him on to the water and in doing so he also invites him into a deeper faith. Peter goes there. He deepens his faith and acts in that faith and, at least for a time, does something that no one had ever done before. He connects into a reality that had never been opened to a human being before. He does it by relying on the trust he had in Jesus and then acting faithfully.

These stories can teach us some important things about faith.

First, faith and trust go hand in hand. What I mean is that where we place our trust, that will guide our actions of faith. This is not a human sort of trust; one that must be earned and can just as easily be withdrawn. It is a trust as in a reliance upon, a dependence upon, that comes from an opening up to an expanded reality. Peter had built that kind of trust in Jesus. Once Peter

confirms that it is truly Jesus who calls him out on to the water, he acts. He steps out in faith and, as a result, embraces the miraculous.

But there is another side to this equation. It also means that if we place our trust in other things, our acts of faith look different and have different results. For example, if we put our trust in money, if we embrace that reality, our actions of faith will be driven by money and accumulation. If we place our trust in government, then our actions of faith will be driven by politics and other humans with varied agendas. If we place our trust in ourselves, then our actions of faith will stop at our own front door. Faith and trust go hand and hand.

Second, the power, or the lack thereof, of the actions of faith that we take will be determined by that in which we place our trust. What we trust in will expand or limit the end result of our actions of faith. A trust in worldly wealth will never be able to take us past what wealth can provide. A trust in worldly power will never empower us beyond the desire to rule over and control others. Trust in earthly pleasures may bring us a type of temporal happiness, but it will never transform mere happiness into heavenly joy. Trust in Christ, however, starts on the water and expands from there, without limits.

Thirdly, where we place our trust, and how that drives our faith, determines how we experience relationship. Or put more simply, Relationship ( capital R) determines relationships. How we interact with each other, is driven by the primary relationship that drives each one of us in our lives. It is determined by where, or in whom, we place our trust. And the same holds true for society as a whole. If the primary force that drives our societal existence is financial accumulation and personal comfort, then each and every person we meet along the way will be measured by how they serve or diminish that primary value for each of us. If pleasure is the primary relationship we seek, if that is the primary value of society, then each person will be measured by their ability to provide pleasure, however that is defined and any particular time. Power seeks the control of others; Fear seeks separation and the elimination of those who are different; and the self-focus ends up pursuing personal truth over ultimate truth.

Christ, however, as our primary relationship, leads us beyond the worldly, on to the miraculous...if we will trust in him and act in faith.

A gentile man, a centurion believer, a long time ago sent a message to Jesus. “Lord, I trust in your love, in your wisdom, and in your authority...and within that trust, through that trust, I will make my life into an act of faith.”

And Jesus marveled.

Amen.