

Sermon Reading: Luke 7:1-10

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

⁹ 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." ¹⁰ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

Sermon Theme: Trust Where Real Power Is

"I have the power!" Prince Adam of Eternia raises his magic sword and says, "By the power of Greyskull," transforming into He-man the strongest man in the universe. He then calls out, "I have the power!" and goes on to save the day.

Maybe you've never seen that show and have no idea what I'm talking about. But we like to believe that, don't we? No, we aren't raising magic swords but we want to believe that, "I have the power!" I want to believe that I have the power to fix this problem that no one else can seem to get a handle on. I want to believe that I have the power to get over this sickness without anyone else's help. I want to believe I have the power to control my life and what happens in it. But then we don't. For all of our bravado and wanting to believe in ourselves, we know deep down our own limitations. More often than not we are forced to recognize: I don't have the power. Because of our own limitations and shortcomings we then sinfully treat God as though he has the same. Today Jesus teaches us the truth and to trust where real power is.

Jesus is in the northern region of Israel entering the town of Capernaum. News about Jesus, what he had taught, and what he had already accomplished with driving out demons and healing the sick was widespread throughout the area. So it's of no surprise when a group leaders—the elders of the Jews—come to him for help. Surprisingly they are looking for help for a non-Jew—a Gentile—who was a Roman Centurion (think of

him like a captain in the army). Whereas the more common feeling among the Jews at the time about the Romans seemed to be a strong dislike, they deeply care for this centurion.

Now this centurion had a servant—possibly more like a slave—who was extremely sick; close to the point of death. To the centurion this slave was more than just a worker, he was very precious and highly valued by him. And so when the elders find Jesus they can't make it clear enough that he should go and help out this centurion. **“This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.”** He's a man of the people. He is kind and caring. He's even helped fund the building project for our place of worship. If there's a man who deserves your help, it's this guy!” And without saying a word, Jesus goes.

As they are on their way another group meets them. Now it's the friends of the centurion who stop Jesus in his tracks. What we hear from the centurion is the exact opposite what the elders said. **“Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.”** It's quite possible that while Jesus was on his way the centurion had more time to think and he came to the conclusion that he couldn't believe that he dared to ask Jesus to come to him. Who was he to come into personal contact with the majesty, authority, and power revealed in Jesus? I am not worthy, he is saying. I don't deserve Jesus coming to my house. The man recognizes who he is. He's a non-Jew, a Gentile, someone outside of God's chosen people, not worthy to associate with the Savior for God's people. He recognizes where the true power resides. That's why he sent those elders in the first place and why he doesn't want Jesus to come under his roof; he's not worthy. In the centurion we see how faith approaches God in humility because it recognizes where the power is.

“I believe in God the Father almighty,” we confess in the Apostles Creed. We like to think of God as the heavenly Father; it's a comforting one and true. We like to see Jesus as that kind loving shepherd of the sheep who cares for and watches over us. We picture the Holy Spirit as that descending dove who comes to give us peace. God is all of that and more. He is almighty. That means there are no limits to his powers and capabilities. He's not hedged in by the laws of time and nature. From nothing, he creates everything. All it took was a simple word, “Let there be,” and creation was. His power is infinite which makes the Almighty completely independent. He doesn't rely on anyone. He doesn't need anything to feel fulfilled. He is under no obligation to anyone except himself.

And yet, by the way we approach God, it can seem like we place him on our level. We treat him as if he is someone we can make demands of according to our own terms. We

want something done *this* way and in *this* time frame. But then you get upset when life doesn't go the way you had planned or expected. (It really shows us how little power we do have.)

Or, we treat him as if we can strike a bargain with him or sway his opinion with our own personal resumes. Like those Jewish elders you may approach God with all of these different reasons for why he should do this. "Lord, I don't ask for much, but this time if you could..." Or, it's because of your love for other people and the sacrifices you have made. It's because of how you went above and beyond to serve; how you volunteer for these projects at church, the offering you give to build it up; you did those chores at home without anyone asking. It's because you went to church this week. You may not come out and say it but if we are honest there's that thought lurking in our minds, "I deserve this."

We have little problem bringing up all those things that make us worthy, all that we haven't done that shows how we deserve God's attention. We also have little problem with ignoring all that makes us unworthy, why we don't deserve his attention. But as obvious as a stain on the front of a white shirt is, what makes you unworthy, that sin, is obvious in your life staining everything. How dare I stand before God and think that my little accomplishments could even come close to swaying his opinion and impress him.

When Jesus goes with the Jewish elders he doesn't do it because of the great resume that the Jews had spoken about the centurion. Jesus was under no obligation. He didn't have to. He goes because he is the Great Physician who cares for his people. It's that same Jesus who goes to you. Jesus wants you to know, "I know that you are not worthy. I know you don't deserve my help. I know even better than you because all that unworthiness that stained you I claimed to be mine. All those sins, I put them on myself. I didn't have to and no one could force me. But I chose to come for you. I know you couldn't stand before God's throne on your own. Don't worry, I'll take you to him. You have nothing to fear. I've already washed your sin-stained hands. You can stop trying to be more worthy or deserving. God already sees my perfection and holiness that I give you. You want to know power? I took your sin-stained heart and sent the Spirit to create in you a new heart." It's this new heart with saving faith that recognizes who we are by nature and recognizes where the true power is and approaches God with humility.

When Jesus heard the message from the centurion's friends, he was amazed. He turns to the crowd and says, "**I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.**" The centurion knew and believed that he didn't need Jesus' physical presence or physical touch to save his servant. He said to Jesus, "**Say the word, and my servant will be healed.**" The centurion knew how it worked; he was a man with authority and power. When he said something, it was done. He knows where the power resides; not in himself

but in Jesus. All Jesus had to do was speak the word and the centurion knew his slave who he dearly cared for would be healed.

Faith doesn't just know that God is almighty; it trusts, grasps and clings to God's power. How often have we heard it said or said it ourselves when faced with a difficult situation, when we can't figure out what to do, when it looks like there is little direction, we say "I know but..." when reminded of God's power and his promises. Even when we pray we may put our own limitations on God thinking he would never do something like that for me. Too easily we place him on our level thinking it's not like God will actually heal him.

But doubting and questioning is not trusting. Faith does not question, it trusts. And it trusts not in you or its own strength. You may have heard or said that you just need to believe more and then it will happen. But again that's looking at this the wrong way. Prayer, faith, it's not this magical act that if you have or do so much of it, then you are going to get your way. As it was with the centurion so it is with us. Jesus doesn't do something because we are more worthy than someone else or more deserving. It's not based on your own strength of faith. An electric cord hanging on the wall has no power unless it is plugged in. The power of faith comes from the one who faith is connected to.

Saving faith connects you to Jesus who tells you, "I know how quickly it can change for you. I know how one moment your faith is strong and the next you have trouble knowing where to turn and what to do. I know how you struggle to believe and questions of doubt come too easily and quickly. I forgive you. That's how powerful I am—I forgive you all your sins. Despite what it might look like to your physical eyes, your eyes of faith see and believe. In spite of your doubt, your Father showers you with blessings with all that you need for your daily life. And you know what, he even commends you for the little things done in my name; so keep it up! Yes, you may struggle at times. But I'm not leaving you alone. I give you my grace, my love that is sufficient for you."

That grace—undeserved love freely given by Jesus—comes to you the same way that Jesus healed that centurion's servant: his Word. It was the Word with the water in baptism that cleansed you of sin and made you God's child. It's with his Word preached and taught to you that creates and sustains faith. It's with his Word with bread and wine that assures your sins are forgiven. It's by that Word that you know, believe, and trust that real power, almighty power is found in your God. Amen.