

Sermon for 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, June 2nd, 2013

Luke 7:1-10

Blessings to you and **peace** from God the Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,
and the **Holy** Spirit. Amen

Generally on Wednesday mornings I travel to Corona to meet with some other pastors from this area to study the lessons for the **upcoming** Sunday. There usually are anywhere from between **4 to 6** of us who gather together. This last week one of the pastors who came to our meeting is now a **hospice** chaplain. During the course of the morning our conversation drifted to the subject of faith—**especially** as to how faith does or does not play a part for people as they experience **either** the death of a loved one or how they go about experiencing their **own** death.

I told them of an event which happened to me when I was doing my chaplain **internship** at St. Joseph Hospital in Orange County. When we were **on call** at the hospital on weekends we also held the *responsibility* for being the chaplain for the Children's Hospital which is **right** next to St. Joseph. This **one** particular Saturday I was paged to go over to the children's hospital as there was an **8 year old** boy who had cancer and was near death.

When I got to the floor the nurses **briefed** me about the case and the family. I **prayed, slid the sliding glass door open, and walked** into the room. There were the **two** parents leaning over their son. They were talking to him in a **quiet** tone. Next I noticed a **young** girl about 10 years old who was **standing alone** in the corner of the room. The family was Chinese. The nurses had told me that they had **only** been in this country for a couple of years. The parents did not speak English very well so the daughter **translated** much of our conversation.

During our time together I learned that the family was **not** Christian; yet when they came to this country the parents had decided to send their two children to a **Christian** school. I was told that they knew the importance of **believing** in God, the **Christian** religion, and living a **Christian** way of life. While I was in that young boy's room we **prayed**, we said the **Lord's Prayer** together as *best* we could, and through the daughter's translation the parents thanked me for coming as they had **no family** in the United States. The doctors and the nurses at CHOC were the closest thing to family they had here. There they stood in all their grief, strangers—some might call them foreigners—in a strange land, with nowhere to turn but to **God** and a **lowly** chaplain intern. *Faith shows up in unexpected ways.*

In our **first** reading for today from the book of 1 Kings King Solomon is **standing** before the altar of the Lord, he spreads out his hands and says, “O Lord, God of Israel, there is **no** God like you in heaven above or on earth.” He continues later by saying, “When a **foreigner**, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a **distant land** because of your name—for they shall **hear** of your great name, your **mighty** hand, and your **outstretched** arm—when a **foreigner** comes and prays toward this house, then **hear** in heaven your dwelling place, so that **all** the peoples of the earth may know your name.” Solomon asked God to answer the prayers of the **foreigners** who would come to pray in the temple.

God hears **all our prayers** in His dwelling place in heaven. What **great faith** it takes to **truly** believe that. God hears the **pleading** and the **prayers** of our hearts. I know **deep** in my soul that God **heard** the prayers of the family the day I was in that young boy’s hospital room. *Faith shows up in unexpected ways.*

Our gospel story for today is another example of great faith in the face of death as well as an example of the boundaries of faith in the **power of God** being extended beyond the Jewish community. A *unnamed* Roman centurion, a man who was himself a foreigner in a society where foreigners were regarded with **suspicion and/or hostility**, a man who **commanded** soldiers into battle, a man who was used to **having authority**, a man of **position and power**, and a man who

was a **pagan and a gentile**; yet, he came with a humble request—he requested a **prayer, a word said** by Jesus for the **healing** of his valued slave. This was a man who had **faith** in the person, and the power, and the authority of Jesus.

This miracle which Jesus performed was **different** from other miracles in that there was no instance of Jesus being **together** with the slave, there was no word spoken over the person who was ill, and there was no touch involved. The miracle was accomplished because of a **man’s faith** in what God could do and with only with a **word spoken** by Jesus from a distance. The centurion **never** came face to face with Jesus.

Feeling **unworthy** to come before Jesus himself or to have him in his home he sent the **Jewish elders** to ask Jesus to come and heal this slave whom he valued. The Jews **appealed** to Jesus earnestly telling Jesus that the centurion was worthy of having Jesus do this for him—he loved the Jewish people, he built a synagogue for them. This was **no ordinary** Roman soldier. **Faith shows up in unexpected ways.**

Hearing the request Jesus went **right away**—no questions asked. Jesus **knew** that to go into the house of a gentile would have made him *ritually* unclean—but that **did not** matter. When Jesus got close to the centurion’s house the centurion sent his friends to tell Jesus, “*Lord, do not trouble yourself.*” Now

listen to the fact that the centurion called Jesus “Lord”. This is significant because for a Roman to use the name “**lord**” it would mean ruler, king, or God. The Roman emperor wanted to be addressed as ‘lord’ because he **claimed** himself to be a god. When the centurion called Jesus “Lord” he was recognizing and faithfully confirming that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God. It is no wonder that Jesus was **amazed** at him saying that this centurion’s faith was **like none** he had found in Israel.

Then the centurion’s friends continue to **convey** the message, “But only **speak** the WORD, and let my servant be healed.” In Hebrew the word for “word” is dabar. It means **not only** a spoken word, but also a **deed done**. It was believed that the word had the power within it to do what the word meant. The centurion had **faith** in the power of Jesus’ word. His faith told him that all Jesus had to do was say, “Your slave is well.” and it would be so. Jesus’ word was enough as just saying the word had the **healing power** of God included within it.

This miracle **speaks** to us, who, *unlike the first believers*, have not seen nor heard Jesus. For us there can be no concrete, personal contact with the One in heaven. Much like the centurion, our faith comes from believing without seeing or meeting Jesus face to face. This miracle **assures us** that Jesus is real and living even though we **cannot** see him. Jesus is able to **help us and heal us** even though

he does not physically come into our homes or into our hospital rooms. ***Faith shows up in unexpected ways.***

I would like to close with a quote from **Martin Luther** on faith. (quote)
“Oh, it is a busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. Faith is a living, daring confidence in God’s grace, so sure and certain that the believer would stake his **life** on it a **thousand** times. This knowledge of a confidence in God’s grace makes people **glad and bold and happy** in dealing with God and with **all** creatures. And this is the work which the **Holy Spirit** performs in faith. Because of it, without compulsion, a person is **ready and glad** to do good to everyone, to serve everyone, to suffer everything, out of **love and praise** to God who has shown them this grace.” (end quote)

Faith shows up in unexpected ways whether we are gentile or Jew, pagan or believer, slave or free, or maybe even to those we consider the foreigner in our midst because it is **always and at all times** about God’s surprising *grace, love, and mercy* which extends to us all. **AMEN.**

