

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Second Sunday After Epiphany, January 14, 2024**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 342, 65:1, 353:1-5, 324:1-4, 508.

Lessons: Isaiah 49:1-7, Acts 11:1-18, Luke 7:1-10.

Sermon Text: Matthew 8:5-13.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Wouldn't it be nice if Jesus would be right here with us healing all our diseases like he did for many people while he was on earth?

Sometimes it is easy to think that we have suffered enough and probably deserve more good things from God than we seem to have.

Today we see that Jesus has power to heal diseases and that faith can lead to remarkable gifts from God. It also happens that Jesus heals a servant of a Gentile, a man who was not part of God's chosen people to whom the Savior was sent.

Let's look today at

**THE FAITH OF AN 'OUTSIDER'**

- 1. We learn of a Gentile who asks Jesus for healing.**
- 2. Jesus is ready and willing to heal, and**
- 3. He marvels at the faith of this Gentile,**
- 4. Whose faith is greater than those who had the Word of God and expected to go to heaven because they were part of the nation of God's chosen people.**

Capernaum is the city which Jesus chose for his home during his ministry in the region of the Sea of Galilee. Here he comes into contact with a centurion. A centurion was a leader of Roman soldiers who had a hundred men under him. He was a foreigner, not a member of the Jewish nation or a Jewish synagogue. We don't know how he had heard about Jesus, but he had apparently learned to know about the true God. and he may have heard about Jesus healing others, and he wanted to ask Jesus to come and heal his servant.

He acknowledges that he is a leader who has lots of power, but he realized he had no power over suffering and illness.

Luke tells us that he sent others to ask Jesus for a favor for himself and his servant.

He humbly approached Jesus. He was not demanding but he was asking for help. He asked instead of demanded.

The elders of the Jews in Capernaum recognized this centurion as a special friend to the Jewish people. They emphasized this man's "worthiness" by telling Jesus that the centurion had built a synagogue for the Jewish people. *"When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, 'This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.'" (Luke 7:4-5, NIV84)*

They felt that the centurion was worthy to have Jesus come and heal his servant. He had an urgent message to the Lord for his servant, who had been ill with a painful illness which was a form of paralysis.

But what makes one "worthy" to have God do anything for him or her? In our worship services we confess all our sins and admit that we "justly deserve [God's] temporal and eternal punishment" instead of anything good from God. The centurion himself says he is not worthy. So must we all recognize that we are not worthy of the least of God's mercies. Our sins make us totally unworthy.

Jesus comes right to the point in showing God's mercy. ***"Jesus said to him, 'I will go and heal him.'"*** It is not the centurion's supposed "worthiness" that moves Jesus to heal the servant but God's love. A mere statement of need and trouble was sufficient to lead Jesus to help. He plainly declares his willingness to come and help. Remember that in all things God's supreme power decides sickness and health, death and life. Unworthy though we are, we still approach God daily with our prayers asking for his mercy in our lives, too.

When the centurion hears that Christ himself is coming, he sends other messengers with the message that he doesn't deserve to have Jesus come into his house. We read that Jesus ***"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.'"*** (Luke 7:6, NIV84) He doesn't want Jesus to trouble himself by coming to his home. He believes that it is sufficient that Jesus say some word to heal his servant, and then the centurion would be satisfied.

He recognizes his unworthiness. He acknowledges Christ's mercy as well as his own total unworthiness. We see here a strong faith, believing that Jesus can heal his servant.

On the other hand, unbelief, presumption, ignorance will hinder any kind of relationship between God and man. The centurion sends the message to Jesus: ***"Just say the word, and my servant will be healed."*** He was certain that Jesus could heal his servant without even seeing him.

As an army officer he understood how he could command the soldiers under him and they would obey immediately without question.

He knows how authority works. He was a man under authority – he had superiors who commanded him and he also had authority to tell others what to do, and expect that they do it.

He does not boast about his power and importance. Instead, he humbly gives Christ the honor which belongs to him. The centurion, though he had authority over 100 soldiers, still had to obey his commanding officer. He recognizes and has faith in the power and authority of Jesus to heal. He even makes reference to the almighty power of Christ's word.

We believe, just as the Centurion did, that Jesus as the Son of God has power over every kind of disease and all the forces of nature. And just as Jesus is able to heal all our diseases, he exercised that power by healing the centurion's servant without even seeing him.

We, too, must recognize our unworthiness before God. The centurion tells Jesus – just say the word.

Listen to Jesus' response: ***"When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, 'I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.'"***

He marvels at the faith of this Gentile. He recognizes that this man's saving faith is greater than those who had the Word of God and expected to go to heaven because they were part of the nation of God's chosen people.

Jesus commended the faith of this centurion and promised that many more Gentiles from all over the earth would be received into his kingdom. ***"I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."*** He also warned that many ***"subjects of the kingdom,"*** that is, physical descendants of Abraham who did not share Abraham's faith in the Savior, would be cast into outer darkness, that is, into eternal damnation in hell. They would be permanently separated from the presence of the Lord and Savior and would suffer the pains of eternal damnation in hell. Their ***"weeping and gnashing of teeth"*** would never end.

The faith of this Gentile was greater than any Jesus had found among the people of Israel.

Jesus had been sent first to the descendants of Abraham, the Jews, the 'children of Israel'. He knew they would reject him and would be the people who would crucify him. They had the advantage that ***"Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised!"*** (Romans 9:5, NIV84)

We are reminded of Paul's words in Romans: ***"What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? [that is, in being a Jew?] Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God."*** (Romans 3:1–2, NIV84)

It is because of the Jews that we have especially the inspired words of the Old Testament. Jesus' first followers in the New Testament were also Jews.

But simply being Jewish does not guarantee heaven.

Not even among the Jews, his own people, had Jesus found such belief. This extraordinary situation causes him to speak a prophecy concerning Gentiles who would come to faith in him, which reflected in a very uncomplimentary way upon His own countrymen. He talks about the kingdom of God as a great festival, or feast, where the riches of God's mercy would be freely given. We think of the greatest gifts of God's healing – the forgiveness of sins.

The Gentile centurion is one of the first Gentiles in Holy Scripture, after the Magi who came to worship the child Jesus and, in a sense, he represents the first-fruits of all Gentiles – including us here today, whom the Lord would call from all people on earth to share in the glories of heaven.

In the meantime, the descendants of those to whom the promises were made, Jews who were depending upon their earthly relationship to their ancestors but not having their faith, would lose their heritage, because they will not accept Jesus as their Savior. They would be sent to outer darkness instead of the light of heaven, weeping and suffering in hell, gnashing their teeth in helplessness. That would be their lot because of unbelief. And that is exactly what all unbelievers can expect.

Although this is first of all a warning to the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, this is also a warning to us. Jesus had been sent to the descendants of Abraham, the Jews, the 'children of Israel'. He knew they by and large would reject him.

And the blessed result of this Gentile Centurion's faith was this: ***"Then Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.' And his servant was healed at that very hour."***

From this example of healing we might also realize that Jesus' healing from sin and deliverance from eternal death is a message we have been blessed with – for how many years? Let us do everything we can to preserve God's Word in its truth and purity.

It is a message which everyone in the world needs. We dare not take it for granted, but must hold the truth of the Word of God sacred and gladly hear and learn it. And because it is God's free grace offered to everyone, we, too, have the responsibility to reach out and share it, that many may find eternal healing as did this Gentile.

When those who had been sent to Jesus returned to the centurion's house, they found the sick servant restored to perfect health. Thus was the faith of this Gentile rewarded. Faith at all times takes hold of Christ, the Almighty, kind Helper and Savior, and thus it accepts from Christ help, comfort, grace, and every good thing. Faith depends entirely upon the Word, and therefore takes and puts into its own possession all that the Word promises.

Lord, grant that we believe and appreciate the grace of God which can not only heal earthly diseases, but more importantly, heal from sin and death! Amen.