

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 5, 2010**

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Hymns: 382, 375:5, 370, 372, 373:7.

Lessons: 1 Kings 8: 22-23 and 41-43, Galatians 1: 1-10, Matthew 8:5-13

Sermon Text: Luke 7: 1-10.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Does God do things for people because they are “good people” in the eyes of other people?

How do we approach God? Do we approach him in humble repentance, or thinking we deserve what we want?

Humans all, by nature, have the sinful tendency to ignore those people who are unimportant or can't help us in any way. We also have the sinful tendency to want to associate with people who are important in some way. In our sermon text we find Jesus helping a Gentile. Jews in his community thought that he deserved to be helped. But that is not why Jesus helped him.

**JESUS HEALS A GENTILE'S SERVANT BECAUSE OF THE FAITH OF THE GENTILE**

- 1. The Gentile centurion admits his sinfulness and unworthiness,**
- 2. But Jesus commends his faith**

A centurion was a Roman soldier who was the captain of 100 soldiers. So he was a man who had considerable authority. As a soldier, he was a man who was also under the authority of his superiors and surely had to give honor to those who deserved honor in the Roman army. He knew his place under his superiors and his authority over others.

This centurion seems to be a devout, kind, humble man - yet, all the same he is a *centurion* - not only a Gentile, but a Roman soldier, and an instrument of Israel's oppression. But this centurion had an unusual attitude towards his servant, his slave. Under Roman law, a master had the right even to kill his slave, and it was expected that he would do so if the slave became ill or injured to the point where he could not work.

Is it possible that this Roman soldier had heard of the miracles that Jesus had done previously? Is it possible that he had built a synagogue for the Jews to worship in because he had come to believe in the God of the Jews, the true God? Jesus' words lead us to think so.

He sent elders from the Jewish community who asked Jesus to come and heal his servant. But they added something to the request that the centurion didn't have in mind and didn't intend to tell Jesus.

“*Deserves*” is the word used by the elders of the Jews in his community. They recognized the centurion as a special friend of the Jewish people. They emphasized what they thought was this man's worthiness by telling Jesus that he had built a synagogue at Capernaum for the Jewish people. But there is no evidence, in fact just the opposite, that the centurion himself emphasized that he deserved to have Jesus help him. The Centurion simply made his need known to Jesus and trusted Jesus to do the right thing for his servant.

He *“deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” “Deserves!”* The elders looked at the visible things! These things are outward fruits of faith, but *“the LORD looks at the heart.”* 1 Samuel 16:7 and does not do things for us because we are ‘good people.’ Luther correctly speaks of God doing things “all this purely out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.”

The centurion is one who had learned – apparently from the Scriptures of the Jews we call the Old Testament – that he was a sinner. He knew that the wages of sin is death, that is, we do not deserve **anything** because of our sinfulness. For him the law had surely served as a mirror, to show him his sinfulness. The elders of the Jews in Capernaum who first went to Jesus obviously didn’t see him this way. They thought he was a good person, and deserved to have Jesus the prophet do something for him.

But Jesus the Son of God immediately went with them toward the centurion’s house and healed his servant. Why did Jesus go? Surely not because the centurion was deserving of anything, but so that he could speak of faith and in particular, this Gentile’s faith.

Faith! This Gentile had a strong, humble faith. The centurion believed that Jesus had true power from God. After the leaders of the Jews had gone to Jesus, the centurion sent friends in humility and recognizing his own sinfulness – after the elders of the Jews had gone. These friends were to say to Jesus *“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. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 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.”* He believed that Jesus had all authority he needed to heal the servant and need only *“say the word”* to heal the servant. As an army officer, he understood how he could command the soldiers under him and they would obey immediately without question.

Jesus as the Son of God had power over every kind of disease as well as all the forces of nature. And he exercised that power by healing the centurion’s servant without even seeing him. Jesus is able to heal all our diseases, too. We must believe that, even if we don’t find that healing when we want it.

In addition, the centurion realized that a pious Jew would never go into the home of a Gentile, and he wanted to spare Jesus this embarrassment. But the greater and more important idea is that the centurion had faith in the very Word of Jesus. So he sent some friends to assure Jesus that he did not expect him to come into a Gentile home. He was certain that Jesus could heal his servant without even seeing him.

However, Jesus did not hesitate to go to the centurion’s house. Would Jesus have actually entered a Gentile’s house? From this history lesson, we don’t know. It was completely against Jewish custom, but not against God’s law.

Apparently, the centurion did not think himself worthy of a personal meeting with Jesus, and perhaps thought Jesus would not *want* to meet with a Gentile like himself, so he sent Jewish leaders as his representatives to Jesus. The centurion also shows great sensitivity to Jesus, in that he wants to spare Jesus the awkward challenge of whether or not to enter a Gentile’s house - as well as the time and trouble of travel. He didn’t know Jesus well enough to know whether or not he would feel awkward; but his *consideration* of Jesus in this situation is impressive. We don’t need to have the centurion’s fear today. We don’t need to send a representative to Jesus - we can come to Him ourselves.

Matthew adds an additional idea from God to the picture: *“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. 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. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." 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." Matthew 8:10-13.***

We see here the foreshadowing or prophecy that many of the physical children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that is, the Jews, the Children of Israel would not believe. They after all, as a nation crucified him. We Gentiles gathered here today – solely by the grace of God, and not because we deserve the beauty of God’s Gospel preached to us – have that opportunity through our faith in Jesus to take our places in the kingdom of heaven. It is not our doing, our deeds. It is not because we deserve it, but solely because of the grace and love of God.

***“The weeping and gnashing of teeth”*** would never end. That’s the picture of hell, of eternal damnation, of complete, eternal separation from God.

Why was Jesus amazed? He answers that question in this way: ***“I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.”*** ***Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.”***

The centurion knew that Jesus had true power from God. We see his strong, humble faith

Now it is Jesus’ turn to be amazed. Many have been astonished at what Jesus had said and done. Now the faith of this centurion causes Jesus to marvel and be amazed.

The centurion fully understands that Jesus’ healing power was not some sort of magic trick that required the magician’s presence. Instead he knew Jesus had true authority, and can command things to be done and completed outside His immediate presence.

He believes that, just as he, a Roman soldier with authority is obeyed by his subordinates, just so surely will the authoritative word of Christ be fulfilled even though He is not present where the sick person is. He admits that he does not deserve anything from God, just as we admitted in our confession of sins in our worship service.

Even as the centurion with a word commanded those under him so Jesus need only speak the word and the servant would be healed.

The elders of the Jews at Capernaum were looking at outward things, in this case, the fruits of faith of the Centurion, and thought that should earn him something. He, by his God-pleasing deeds had shown his faith. In doing so, he also pleased men. The Jews in Capernaum were pleased with this Gentile. Paul in our epistle lesson emphasizes that he is not trying to please men. ***“Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up.”*** Galatians 1:10-11. We see that same point in our sermon text. The Jews who came to Jesus on behalf of this Gentile centurion praised him. But before God the centurion recognized and admitted his own unworthiness. True faith is not a matter of trying to please man, but leads to doing those things that please God.

We must continue to search the scriptures, and listen to and remember, and observe – guard, keep, hold fast to, observe, preserve everything God has told us in his command: ***“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”*** Matthew 28:19-20.

Through everything, we must remember as the hymnwriter tells us:

“By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless;  
My soul, believe and doubt it not.  
Why stagger at this word of promise?  
Hath Scripture ever falsehood taught?  
Nay; then this word must true remain;  
By grace thou, too, shalt heav'n obtain.

“By grace! None dare lay claim to merit;  
Our works and conduct have no worth.  
God in His love sent our Redeemer,  
Christ Jesus, to this sinful earth;  
His death did for our sins atone,  
And we are saved by grace alone.”  
Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal 373:1-2)