

March 15, 2020
Luke 7:1-10
Healing Stories “Just Say the Word”
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Let’s deal with each truth as it unfolds in the story from Luke chapter 7.

First thing we know is the story involves a Roman centurion. Which is all to say, a man who has a lot of power and control. A centurion was a soldier who was in charge of 100 men who had either been appointed by the Senate or Emperor, or who was an enlisted man who had been promoted through the ranks after 15-20 years. In other word, he was put in power by people in power or he was given control after earning it. He trained, made assignments, and maintained discipline in the ranks. He and the men under him built fortifications (so important in enemy territory), escorted prisoners, and procured food and supplies when the army was on the move. Centurions wore military decorations they had received as necklaces, and bracelets and earned pay anywhere for five to 15 times that of an ordinary soldier.

The centurion seemed to have it all. Yet, the power, control, status, influence, money he had didn’t make a bit of difference in his current crisis. His servant needed healing and he couldn’t make it happen. All that he had earned to date, was null and void in the face of his servant who was straddling the line between death and life. He couldn’t order him to the left or the right and he could not even yield any of his power to move him from an unsafe place to a safe place.

Often, we think power and control is everything. Yet the truth of our universe is that power and control are an illusion. Case

in point, we are all now under another's authority in the face of COVID-19.

The solution for the centurion's crisis of helplessness was humility; the kind of humility that shows itself in modesty about one's importance. We all have different roles we assume in life. Yet, we in a moment's notice can have that role completely nullified or reduced in such a way as to know that the world does not turn on us doing this or that. Sometimes we are rendered completely helpless and in this case it is best to recognize who can help, and then let that person help you. In the face of a pandemic, we all realize that in the end God ultimately has all power and control and the final word. In the face of that we want to say, "just say the word"

Next thing we come across in this story is the truth that the Roman centurion valued his servant, and I think we are talking more than seeing him as an income loss if he died.

Sickness and the fear of the arrival of death can cause us to re-evaluate our relationships. Did the Roman centurion always value his slave, who know! What we do know is at a point in time he got a wake up call and then assessed his true value.

COVID-19 is that wake-up call for us! It has provided each of us a chance to not over value what we can do or what another can do for us, but rather value our relationships in and of themselves, and not focus on the return on our investment. The world may value us on what we do, but that is not God's valuation of our worth. We are valued because of who God created us to be, not by what the world sees us do.

Next truth we behold in this story is the crossing of lines, you know those lines drawn in the sand. The line, which can be

swept away with the blowing of the wind, the wind of the Spirit. What do I mean by that in this story? Well, Jesus was a Jew and the centurion worked for the government that not only occupied Jewish land, but also oppressed and even killed Jews.

Yet, this Centurion is not all about the party line. He went to a Jew as a Gentile, as a man, in need of help to someone who could help. He refused to let his role and status dictate his relationships, even with Jews. The battle he chose to fight was certain attitudes and actions toward the Jews.

At this time, we might be tempted to totally isolate ourselves and take care of me and mine. Yet, like the emissaries in this story we need to remember who needs help and get that help to those who need it. That's why our building is still open for 12 step meetings now their choices of where they can meet are far fewer because others have disconnected them. We have been advocates by working all this week to help coordinate and participate in the dissemination and acquisition of food for those who are food insecure throughout our area.

At this time, it might be tempting to retract in fear and worry about reaching out. Yet, as people of faith it never has been and even now is not about my family, my people, and my community. Rather it is about as it has always been about the human family and our need to be emissaries and advocates for those in need. The truth may be in our story, as it was in their story, that without the emissaries and advocates healing might have never happen.

In this story I cannot just pass by what bugs me. The centurion said, “just say the word”, what was the word? We will never know, but I imagine the healing word could have been “loved” or “freed” or “liberated” or “noticed”. Now a question for all of you, **What else do you think might have been a word that merely in it being spoken or declared would bring healing?**

Society has always quantified human beings. And in doing so, we have decided who will live and who will die. Jesus began a movement, which refused to define others merely by their economic value. Jesus saw people as people, not as objects, not as statistics, not as a commodity, not even as the role they were playing in society.

Jesus responded because he saw more faith in this encounter than in all of Israel. Now, let check ourselves here, for a minute, when it comes to hearing the word faith. It is easy to assume that means a set of beliefs. Yet, Jesus often speaks about faith as the way we live and the actions we take. If this is the case here, then Jesus said that this Roman centurion, the emissaries and the advocates showed more of their faith by the way they lived, than anyone else who was around them.

May the same be said of us. Go forth and be the centurion, be the emissary and advocate, and if you find yourself as the ill slave know your worth and the reality that you too can be healed.

Let us pray. We come with humility, God. May we too be the agents that make healing possible, and may those among us who know not their worth, experience in us the undeniable demonstration of their worth in the way we live, move and have our being. Amen.

