

“Amazing Faith”

Luke 7:1-10

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What is faith? How can we be faithful to God? What aspects of faith would amaze Jesus? In all four of the gospels Jesus was only amazed by someone's faith once in today's scripture.

Luke 7:1-10 “After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, Jesus entered Capernaum. A Roman centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to Jesus, asking him to come and heal his slave. When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to Jesus, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, Jesus said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.”

What is it about the centurion's faith that amazed Jesus? Certainly there were much more likely faithful candidates, priest, followers, rabbis, Mary, Joseph, the disciples left everything and followed Jesus. Even more puzzling Luke does not tell us what is so

amazing about the centurion's faith. Biblical scholars have a wide array of the possible aspect of faith that amazed Jesus. I certainly do not have the answer. Scripture is living word, sometimes giving a different answer to each person, sometimes evolving throughout history, sometimes changing based on circumstances, experience, and perceptions.

Let us pray. Holy Spirit please highlight through this message the unique aspect of faith you desire each person to live today. Amen

Jesus was so amazed by the centurion's faith he stopped, turned to the crowd and said. **"I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."** The words spoken before Jesus amazement were, **"Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it."**

These words seem to suggest the amazing faith has to do with authority, power, humility, and confidence. The centurion's faith was a combination of humility—Lord, I am not worthy—and confident—Lord, you can do this. The centurion understood authority and power, their source, and scope. The centurion's power and authority comes from Rome. Jesus power and authority comes from God. Earthly power has tremendous influence over our lives, yet is limited. God's power is infinite, capable of everything. The centurion was a part of the most powerful empire of that time, yet he knew there were some things, such as healing a person, that an earthly power could not do because earthly power has limitations. The centurion believed God was more powerful than the Roman Empire. The centurion acknowledged Jesus' authority by calling Jesus the Lord, and submitting to God. The centurion was living the serenity prayer. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference."

The centurion, who was humble enough to submit to Jesus authority, is an amazing example. At that time the Roman emperor was considered to be a god. Those who followed and submitted to the Roman emperor were considered lesser gods. The centurion submitting to the authority, power and lordship of Jesus put him in grave danger. Not only could the centurion lose his position it was likely that he would earn a one way trip to the coliseum, where Christians who professed faith in God instead of the emperor, were slaughtered for entertainment. Perhaps it is the centurion's humility and bold faith in God that amazed Jesus.

The centurion lived a life of wealth, luxury, and ease. He is risking everything, not for himself, not even for family or a friend. He is risking everything out of compassion for a powerless slave. Perhaps it is the centurion's compassion that amazed Jesus.

The scripture reveals more aspects of this centurion's amazing faith. **“When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to Jesus, asking him to come and heal his slave. When they came to Jesus, they appealed to Jesus earnestly, saying, “The centurion is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us.””** The centurion heard about Jesus, has a loving relationship with the Jews and built the synagogue.

Can you imagine the joy of the Outreach Commission over that capital campaign? As they were stressing over the numbers, trying to gauge what every member could give they are contacted by an outsider, the centurion. How much money and land do you need? The centurion gives the land and pays for the synagogue in full. Perhaps it was the centurion's faithful generosity that amazed Jesus.

Despite the centurion's generosity in building the synagogue, since he was not a Jew, he was an outsider. He was never allowed inside the synagogue and had to stand outside, in the weather, straining to hear. Likely the centurion heard of Jesus through the Old Testament readings, making connections to the information about Jesus through the

grapevine from Jesus' followers. Perhaps it was the centurion's ability to hear about Jesus that amazed Jesus.

The centurion loved the Jews and they loved him back so much so that the Jewish leaders asked Jesus to heal the slave on the centurion's behalf, adding that the centurion is worthy. The centurion is an unprejudiced and unbiased person. Pastor Edward Markquart suggests this would be like living in Mississippi in the 1860's being white yet loving those who are black, building such a relationship with the black community that they advocate on your behalf. The centurion loved the wide diversity of his neighbors. A contemporary comparison would be Christian and Muslims loving and advocating for each other in the United States or Arabs and Israelites loving and advocating for each other in the Middle East. The centurion was breaking down social barriers associated with economic, class, gender and the differentials of political power.

Seminary professor Frank Stalfa wrote. "Insiders and outsiders come together for the sake of each other (Jews and pagans). Those who are supposed to be enemies collaborate for the good of one who has no status (the slave) and on behalf of one who usually represents the wrath of imperial rule (the centurion)... Which is the greater healing miracle, the recovery of the centurion's slave or the totally unexpected collaboration between an oppressor and the oppressed? The healing of relationships is just as important as the healing of bodies and may actually be the precondition for that to happen at all. Could it be that Luke is asking us to consider that healing is often the indirect result of reconciliation and the way the kingdom of God is made real among us? We are drawn to a vision of the healing of a community and the formation of a community of healing that signals God's new reign." Perhaps it is the centurion's love for everyone, impartiality, tolerance, acceptance of all people, that built a loving community, that amazed Jesus.

Jim Wallis wrote. "Prayer is a necessity. Without it we see only our point of view, our own righteousness, and ignore the perspective of our enemies. Prayer breaks down

those distinctions. To do violence to others, you must make them enemies. Prayer, on the other hand, makes enemies into friends. When we have brought our enemies into our hearts in prayer, it becomes most difficult to maintain the hostility necessary for violence.” Perhaps Jesus was amazed by the centurion’s faithful prayer life.

The centurion had the courage to ask for help even though he felt unworthy of God’s help. He knew himself, his strengths, weaknesses, sins and limitations. Perhaps it was the centurion’s perception of grace that amazed Jesus.

The centurion was a mediator between the powerless servant, in need of healing, and God, the source of all healing. Mediators have confident, expectant faith. Mediators presume that God can and will heal. Mediators are not presumptions or entitled. They do not say it is owed to me or I order you to heal in my timing, or I am in charge so do as I pray. Mediators presume God is love, God is all powerful and God will heal in God’s perfect timing. Mediators believe they can be a conduit for God’s healing power.

Frederick Buechner wrote. “We have it in us to be Christs to each other and maybe in some unimaginable way to God too. We have it in us to work miracles of love and healing as well as to have them worked upon us. We have it in us to bless with Jesus and forgive with Jesus and heal with Jesus and once in a while maybe even to grieve with some measure of Jesus’ grief at another’s pain and to rejoice with some measure of Jesus’ rejoicing at another’s joy almost as if it were our own. And who knows but that in the end, by God’s mercy, the two stories will converge for good and all, and though we would never have had the courage or the faith or the wit to die for Jesus any more than we have ever managed to live for Jesus very well either, his story will come true in us at last. And in the meantime, this side of Paradise, it is our business (not, like so many, peddlers of God’s word but as men and women of sincerity) to speak with our hearts (which is what sincerity means) and to bear witness to, and live out of, and live toward, and live by, the true word of his holy story as it seeks to stammer itself forth through the

holy stories of us all.” Perhaps Jesus was amazed by the way the centurion views himself as a mediator of God’s healing power.

The centurion believed in God over self. It has been said that being in a position of power leads to one being inebriated by the exuberance of their own verbosity. The centurion did not let his power corrupt himself. The centurion believed in the power of God. George Hunt wrote. “If we do not believe, we are like the rock on which the river flows: Nothing grows there because it is too hard. If we do believe, we are like the fields by which the river flows: They welcome the river into themselves, and are blessed.” Perhaps it was the centurion’s belief that amazed Jesus.

What aspect of your faith is the Holy Spirit inviting you to nurture today? Amen