

**Luke 7:1-10**June 10, 2007 – 2<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**Such Great Faith!**‡ **Undeserving works** (vv.1-6)‡ **Powerful Word** (vv.7-10)

In the name of Jesus, our powerful and loving Savior, dear fellow servants of God:

One thing that really bothers people about Christianity is the power-love question: “If God is truly loving, does He not have the power to end all suffering? And if God has the power, is His love lacking?” It is as impossible for us to wrap our minds around the power and love of God as it would be to draw a map of the bottom of the ocean. We can’t see it, we can’t go there, and things can change under the sea.

But one of the things that really convinces me the Bible is true is the way it so vividly portrays the power and love of God. These are not abstract philosophies deeper than the sea. God’s power and love are meant for real people with real lives, real loves and weaknesses of their own. In fact, in today’s Gospel Lesson we see God’s power and love at work in a most unlikely character and with a strange collection of friends. This could have escalated beyond a culture clash to a twisted religious war. But we look closely and see no doubt, no conflict. We see **Such Great Faith!** – yes, in an unlikely character.

‡ **Undeserving works** (vv.1-6)

Unless you survived a war zone and felt the terror and hatred of being conquered by cruel oppressors, you can’t appreciate the friendship here. The Roman Empire had crushed all the countries across the Mediterranean world and saved some of its cruelest tactics for the Jews. They in turn had some of the deepest hatred for the Romans because the Jews were God’s chosen people. To have Gentile pagans in control of the Promised Land, taxing ‘til it hurt and scourging the people was more than most Jews could tolerate. But they had to because the Romans had the bigger army and stronger weapons.

Jesus is just passing through the tough days of His early ministry. His own townspeople of Nazareth have tried to kill Him. And the Jewish religious leaders are looking for ways to get rid of Him because He keeps healing on the Sabbath Day and saying things that really irritate them. Now when He comes to His new home base in Capernaum, Galilee, Jesus gets quite a surprise, a very pleasant one.

As God’s own Son and the Word of God Incarnate, Jesus finished everything He had to say to the people, then came into town. *There a centurion’s servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. 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.”*

Can you see the miracles that have already happened? Not at the bottom of the sea, but in the heart and life of this Gentile Roman officer? Why would he care about his servant so much unless God’s love already got to his heart? And why would he send for Jesus unless he believed God’s Word of power that the Rabbi from Nazareth kept speaking and trusted the love behind Jesus’ miracles. People who by all rights should have been his sworn enemies cared enough to carry the man’s miracle request to Jesus. And it was more of a miracle than our English translations suggest because the centurion literally requested that Jesus “completely save” his dying servant. The Jews were convinced the man was righteous because his love for God’s chosen people showed in the way he bankrolled their house of worship. They came close beside Jesus, pleading earnestly for a miracle for this man living beside them.

Do you ever doubt Jesus’ love for you? We all struggle at times. But Jesus sweeps away our fears with His love in action, so natural, so smooth, that you almost miss it. Listen: *“Jesus went with them.”* That’s it! No questions asked. No accusations. *“Jesus went with them”* in God’s love and power.

And that's when He got the big surprise of faith. Everyone needs a miracle long before the one they request. All of us human beings are conceived and born in sin and would be destined for eternal death in hell far, far away from God's love and power. We needed a miracle to save us from eternal torment. God promised to provide, and the Roman centurion had heard God's promises in the Jewish synagogue. He heard and believed in the Messiah to come through the Jewish nation. Now that was a miracle. So was getting along with the Jews and loving his servant and asking God for help. But this? There's another miracle here which shows the power of God's Word like few other things can. Because here you have a complete change in the stubborn pride of man.

Remember now, this is a tough Roman soldier, and not just a private, but a fairly high ranking officer. Can you imagine Jesus' surprise at this? *He 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."* Wait a minute! The Roman conqueror does not see himself even equal to a Jewish rabbi to be under the same roof – even his own roof? That's right, friends. The miracle of humble faith convinced this man that all the good things he did in his life, all his good works and charitable gifts were absolutely **Undeserving works** before God. Truly, here it is in action, God's....

### ✠ **Powerful Word** (vv.7-10)

The centurion's not finished. *"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."* He sees his personal sin so clearly that he does not feel worthy to come to Jesus. Do we feel that way when we go to church, that we are entering the house of God Almighty? God the Holy One? The One God who cannot tolerate even the slightest sins of greed and materialism? Do we see how unworthy we are as individuals, as a congregation, as a synod to come into God's presence with offerings of money which He gave to us by gifts of a job, good health, an education and income to match?

But God's **Powerful Word** is just getting started in the centurion's heart. He also says to Jesus through his friends, *"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."* Jesus, you don't even have to come here. I don't deserve to have you in my house or to come into your holy presence. I know you have the love to help and heal my servant boy. But I also believe you have the power to simply say the word and get it done. No medicine, no tests, no therapy, no drugs – you can just get it done with God's **Powerful Word**.

God's Son sees the miracle plain and clear: *When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel."* Among all His fellow Jews, the chosen people of God, no one had this kind of faith in God's love and His power to help and heal from a distance. No way would Jesus let God's **Powerful Word** be undone. *Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.*

Do you and I feel guilty sometimes because of things we leave undone, kind words left unspoken, angry words too many to remember? Do we wonder how God can possibly love people like us? Do we feel our own weakness to relieve the suffering of a loved one? Do we wish we could do more to help in our community those who are really hurting in body and soul? Do we wish we had the resources to get our dear Wisconsin Synod back on track, not just maintaining ministry but expanding and growing once again? Does it trouble us to see our schools hurting when we'd like them thriving and our future pastors and teachers graduating debt-free? They'll feel their weakness in ministries unable to pay off education debts. They'll feel the need for God's love and power. But here in the Roman centurion we see it in brilliant, down-to-earth, bound-for-heaven glory. **Such Great Faith!** May God have mercy on our **Undeserving works** and bless us with His **Powerful Word** to face our problems squarely in full confidence of God's power and love to help and to heal. For the sake of His blood shed on the cross for us all, may the Name of God be praised! Amen.