

Luke 7:1-10
May 29, 2016

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

It would have been so simple for Jesus to simply say “no.” No to this Roman centurion’s request to heal this servant whom clearly he had great compassion for. It would have been so easy and certainly one could have justifiably made an argument for saying no. After all, this was a Roman soldier. A centurion. The backbone of the Roman army. Centurions were commanders in charge of many soldiers and most likely, this man was a Gentile under the order of the Emperor to enforce Roman law in all places and by any means necessary. This man was an outsider, a foreigner, an enemy, one that certainly may have even oppressed and made life miserable for those living in Judea – the house of Israel Jesus even referenced at certain points He was called to. So, Jesus could have simply said “no.” That would have made things so much easier, right? Because then the church throughout the ages could have justified itself in saying “no.” No to all those who are different. No to all those who are foreigners. No to all those we deem our enemies. No to all we may deem, on face value alone, unworthy of God’s grace. And maybe even more importantly it would have let us off the hook of actually crossing boundaries and getting to know our neighbors who are uniquely different from us. It would have given us a pass from being sent from these doors and venturing across

the tracks to the other side where we often are afraid and unwilling to go. Oh, Jesus, why couldn't you have just said "no?"

Now, part of the problem with our text is that we really are missing so much information. There is so much we don't know. We don't know how this centurion heard about Jesus? We don't know anything about his slave – perhaps he was Jewish and this was the connection to Jesus? We don't know why it was this centurion had so much compassion for his servant? We don't know what happened to this centurion and his servant beyond this scene we have before us today. But we do know several things which are critical and shape our understanding of being a disciple of Jesus and living out our faith in the world todayⁱ. We do know Jesus didn't say "no." Jesus took the risk. He said "yes" even to this leader in the Roman army – the most heinous war machine in the day. Jesus doesn't let that stand in the way or scare him off. Jesus sees in this man something else. He sees, despite everything that may deem him an outsider, a faith which amazes even Jesus. He sees a man who cares deeply for another human being created in the image of God. He sees a man willing to put his own career, livelihood, reputation, and even life on the line in seeking out Jesus. He sees a man who believes Jesus can heal simply by uttering the words. He sees what so many "insiders" can't see. This man who stands outside the Temple, outside the Jewish faith, outside the people of God, outside the province of Judea, and may represent all that threatens the people of Judea and represents all for whom the long-awaited Messiah would come and destroy.

Jesus doesn't destroy. He doesn't dismiss. He doesn't avoid because he is different. He doesn't do any of this because He is not that kind of Messiah. He is not that kind of King. His Father in heaven is not that kind of God. Jesus doesn't do this because even despite the fact this man's status in the Roman military and the fact he has undoubtedly done things for which make him deem unworthy of being in the presence of Jesus, Jesus also knows God is at work in this man. We are told by the Jewish elders themselves, "He loves our people, and it he who built our synagogue for us." And Jesus himself was amazed at this man. Amazed at an outsider's faith.

We live in a challenging time where daily we are bombarded with political rhetoric telling us who to be afraid of, who is the cause for all our problems, and painting a canvass with a very large brush that carries with it a broad stroke classifying an entire group of people as the enemy and the root of all evil in the world. As Christians each uniquely created by God and each having been given the freedom to make choices it is without doubt we will disagree with each other on a host of issues. We know some of us will choose to follow one political candidate over the other, align ourselves with one political party over the other or will simply remain independent. And thus, the challenge arises how does our faith factor into all of this? How does being a Christian factor into the decisions we make?

This is not an easy answer and I don't see it as the church's role to endorse one candidate over the other; however, the gospel of Jesus Christ which does call the church

to often be profoundly different than the world around us. The gospel of Jesus Christ does lead us to align ourselves and guide our decisions with our Lord and Savior, who while we were still sinners died for us and demonstrated God's love for us. (Romans 5:8)

Or we could say, we who were once unworthy now are worthy solely through God's grace revealed through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ does call us to see God in the other and see that God does work even in those who may not be followers of Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ does call us to a foundational hospitality that acknowledges Jesus Christ came to rescue and redeem the whole world. The gospel of Jesus Christ does call us to love one another despite our differences. The gospel of Jesus Christ does call us, even the midst of disagreement, to speak well of one another, to respect one another, and to acknowledge that God may be at work even in those we simply don't deem possible and we may even vehemently opposed. For we know that with God all things are possible. (Matthew 19:26) The gospel of Jesus Christ does call us to overcome the fear, be open to those different than we are, stand up for laws and policies that promote hatred, further the continuance of injustice, racism, sexism, classism, and don't align with the belief that all are created equal in the eyes of their Creator, and in so doing – in being open, in embracing a hospitality of grace and humility, in crossing the line and encountering the other, in overcoming our fears and preconceived notions and biases, in looking past all those

things that separate because when we do that we just may be amazed at what we find.

Amazed just as Jesus was. Amen.

ⁱ David Lose; In the Meantime Pentecost 2C – Welcoming Difference; www.davidlose.net