

February 7 2021

Luke 7:1-17

The Roman Centurion's Servant

Children's Message: I have often wondered if imagination could be the back door of faith. If faith was a house would it be easier to knock at the back door and come in. Sometimes knocking on the front door can be intimidating and formal. I think knocking at the back door is far more friendly and less formal. Having a good imagination helps to understand the things we believe. That in turn can help our faith.

Close your eyes and picture in your head the story we heard this morning. How Jesus healed a Roman centurion's servant by just saying the words. We are not told what Jesus actually said that healed this person. We could imagine that it was something simple like, "Be healed". How did you imagine this happening in your mind? This exercise is a form of Christian meditation that is used to strengthen your faith. It sometimes fills in the blanks of the story. Mind you there are some stories that are so beyond what our imagination can understand. Those stories can only be taken on faith. Imagination can only take us so far and then faith takes us the rest of the way.

This is a nice exercise to help develop and strengthen our faith by using our imaginations to help see the story unfold in our minds. The Roman Centurion this morning had great faith in Jesus and what He could do. The Centurion believed in his head and heart that Jesus just had to say

the word and his servant would be healed. The Centurion thought about it all first and saw how it would happen. Most importantly he had great faith in Jesus and His power to heal with just a word. In the end his servant was healed by Jesus's word, just as he believed.

Adult's Message: In Luke's gospel we hear about how Jesus was amazed. Some translations also use the word marvelled. Jesus is only recorded to be amazed twice in the Gospels. The other account is in Mark 6:6 and it is not as pleasant as the story in Luke. In Mark, Jesus is amazed at their unbelief and the outright rejection He experiences in His home town.

The Roman Centurion is the person that amazes Jesus. What is it that amazed Jesus about this person? Well it was his understanding of faith and its power. The Roman Centurion knew and understood a little bit of what Jesus knew, yet it was far more than the people around him. At this stage in Jesus's ministry, The Roman Centurion knew more about the power of faith than the disciples and apostles. Their faith would be encouraged and strengthen over the next three years of following Jesus. The Roman Centurions understanding of faith was deeper than most.

We can only assume that Paul was not present at this encounter. At least it wasn't recorded as such. Yet in his letter to the Romans, 10:17 he describes faith wonderfully. "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes from the word of Christ." Ironic that Paul wrote these words to the church in Rome and it was a Roman Centurion's faith that amazed Jesus.

Thinking about the encounter I feel the Centurion had three understandings of the power of the word. His first understanding came

from his military experiences. He tells us as much in verse eight. “And I say to one, go, and he goes; and to another, come, and he comes; and to my servant; do this and he does it. The power of the word to command. However the Centurion’s understanding of the power of the word is far deeper. He understands that the power of the word can heal and create health in his servant. Jesus just has to say the word and it will be done. In the Centurion’s mind this is what is going to happen. The Centurion’s understanding of the power of the word to create is what amazed Jesus. This is the second understanding and it is mostly reserved for Rabbis and not Centurions.

The prologue of John’s Gospel begins with the power of the word. “In the beginning was the WORD and the WORD was with God and the WORD was God”. In Genesis, God created the entire universe with the word. Words have the power to bless and well-meaning words can create. Nothing can deflate a person’s feeling more than a well-placed negative word.

The power of the word starts in our minds or imagination. How we select the words we use begins in our heads before we say them. They should be intentional and with much thought before they exit our mouth. That is why thoughtless words and speech is so dangerous. They trip off our tongues with no intention, but they are still powerful. Those words still carry meaning. The lesson is to choose our words wisely and to think before we speak. Sometimes it is best to say nothing and let everyone think you are brilliant.

Back to the Centurion. The third understanding of the power of the word that he had was faith. He had great faith in Jesus that He could heal with just a word. This is what put his understanding far beyond his

contemporaries. That is what also amazed Jesus. We can understand the power of the word to command. We could stretch our imaginations to understand the power of the word to create, but it does not become a reality without faith. Faith in Jesus makes it a reality. Just as it did for the Centurion. Now we know what the Centurion knew.

These sermons were difficult for me. I rewrote and drafted them many times. I struggled with finding the words to properly explain the thoughts in my head. How ironic that the sermons were about the power of the word and imagination. God bless and stay safe, Pastor D