

## Such Great Faith!

Luke 7:1-10

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

June 2, 2013 – Second Sunday After Pentecost



Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Faith – faith is what the Christian life is all about. It’s about God giving faith to His people – a marvelously rich faith which leads to eternal life. All of us have known others whom we considered to have great faith. Indeed, I’ve always been surprised at how many believe that because I’m a pastor I must be one of those people – that I possess a faith “far greater” than what’s possible for those of you who “only” sit in the pew. I’ve actually had people tell me this on more than one occasion. But I have to tell you quite frankly that it’s most unsettling to have that kind of weight and expectation placed on one’s shoulders – for, as my wife would be glad to tell you if you asked, we pastors are all sinners, and the faith we possess is no different from your own. Like you, there are many times when I’ve had doubts about my faith and have quite often struggled to live the Christian life.

What bolsters us pastors in our faith, however, is the privilege God has given us of serving His people. What strengthens us in this Holy Office is being able to watch God at work among His Church through Word and Sacrament – to see His Word moving people so that they cling to the Truth of the Gospel and rely on God’s promises even in the direst of straits – to witness the difference the Lord’s Supper makes in the life of one who is near death – to catch a small glimpse of the peace a dying Christian has in the confidence of their Baptism – to watch the peace of Christ Himself strengthen further one who has already suffered pain and illness with the unshakeable conviction that while this world is a veil of tears – God still graciously gives His children that world which is yet to come – a world of pure joy, light and peace.

So, a pastor’s faith is no different from yours – we’ve simply been given the high privilege of seeing *your* God-given faith in action. And because of what we’ve seen, we’re constantly reminded how God’s promises are indeed very true. It’s easy to admire such a faith because of its Divine origins, and because it’s so amazing! Now here in this morning’s Gospel, we find our Lord Jesus Himself admiring the faith of one particular Gentile soldier. He said concerning him: “I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” Now in Lutheran Theology, we often speak of saving faith – the kind of faith which claims and clings to the merits of our crucified, risen Lord Jesus. But, we also speak of

faith in terms of how it trusts in the promises of God at times of specific need. And of this faith there are three facets:

First of all, this faith presupposes a certain amount of knowledge. Although the Centurion in this morning’s reading wasn’t a Jew, it’s patently obvious that he knew *something* about Jesus. After all, Jesus *was* very popular with the people. He traveled all over the Galilean countryside, preaching, teaching and performing great signs and wonders. Word about Him – not to mention all the things that were happening everywhere He went – was spread far and wide. To be sure, there were even a goodly number of Jews who believed in Jesus and gave specific testimony concerning Him. They freely spoke with others about what they had seen and heard, and were quite open concerning the fact that they believed in Him.

Like these Jews, you have also heard about this Jesus. You’ve heard the accounts of His life from your parents, grandparents, families and friends. And having heard these things, you’ve come here today to hear even more. You’ve come to worship, to bring your children to be Baptized, to bring them, your family and others to Sunday School and Vacation Bible School. You’ve made arrangements for them to receive formal training in the faith through Catechetical instruction. In short, just as the Church has done throughout history, what you’ve heard about Jesus you’ve passed along to others. You’ve told them what you know, what you believe, and what you’ve been given. In other words, you’ve been what God has called us all to be, evangelists – and you’ve done that by passing along to others those things which have been given to you – those things you know and believe to be true. Living in this God-given faith, our Lord has enabled you to be His witnesses, His ambassadors, and workers in His Kingdom. All these things have become your rightful task and privilege as a Christian.

Secondly, faith also includes agreement. By the Power of the Holy Spirit working in you, you have been privileged to confess those things we all agree on concerning God’s Word as it comes to us written down by the Prophets, Apostles and Evangelists in the Holy Scriptures. You agree with this Word concerning who Jesus is, what He’s done, and what He continues to do for us poor sinners. Every Lord’s Day you make a public confession of this agreement by way of our worship and regular public recitation of one of the three Ecu-

menical Creeds of the Church – the Apostles', the Nicene, or the Athanasian Creed. In other words, you believe God's Promises – and in His fulfillment of those Promises through our Savior, Jesus Christ. In the very same way, the Centurion in this morning's Gospel also believed the things He'd seen and heard concerning Jesus. There's no way we can say with any degree of certainty that he recognized Jesus as Messiah, but clearly he understood that Jesus had been sent from God and that therefore he was going to listen to what He had to say.

The third component of faith is trust. There was a traveling circus whose most famous act was that of a high-wire-walker. This man's steadiness on the wire was without peer, and his reputation was well-known. Everywhere people were stunned by his death-defying feats. All agreed he could do anything on that wire he wanted to do. Well, one day this performer addressed the crowd and said to them: "How many of you believe I can walk the length of the high wire with a chair on my back?" The crowd was hushed, but soon they all agreed and indicated their agreement with much cheering. Next he asked: "How many of you believe I can cross this wire with someone sitting on the chair?" Again, the crowd roared approval. Waving his arms to quiet them, he then asked: "Which one of you would be willing to sit in the chair?" He was met with stony silence and the sound of crickets. They all agreed he was the best high-wire-walker there ever was, but none was willing to trust their life to him by sitting in that chair!

The Centurion also trusted what he had heard about Jesus – so much so that when his situation was desperate he called for Jesus because he believed He could help him. He trusted not only that Jesus could help, but also that He would! Recognizing his own unworthiness he said to Him: "Just speak the word and my servant will be healed." As you walk the road of life, there are going to be times when your back is up against the wall and you find yourself in dire straits. You might face sickness, difficulties with your family, school or job. Maybe it'll be a shortage of cash, or the death of someone near and dear. Sadly, however, we often face such problems relying on our own resources, strength and wisdom. Though we know the promises of God and claim to believe them, we often fail to trust that He will actually deliver.

I heard a story once of a traveler from long ago who'd come to the banks of the Mississippi early in the winter and was perplexed because he had to cross over to the other side, but didn't know whether the ice covering the river was safe. It was so foggy he couldn't even see far enough to know whether or not the ice reached the other side. Feeling he could wait no longer, he began to inch his way across the ice on his hands and knees – touching the surface nervously to see if there

was any weakness which might cause it to fail. Suddenly he heard singing behind him. Looking around he saw a man coming out of the fog driving a horse-drawn wagon with full load of coal! Can you picture the scene? One man crawling along on his hands and knees in fear and trembling, while the other was happily singing as he drove his horse and wagon across the ice weighed down with a full load of coal?

How often do you act more like the man on his hands and knees, rather than the one who sang and drove his horse across the ice with confidence? That's a universal problem for all of us who believe. We all have doubts, fears and are prone to wonder why God allows certain things to happen. Under fire from the troubles of life, we wonder why God seems so far away and distant when we need Him close at hand. We pray and sometimes matters get worse. Seeing nothing truly good in the world, feeling the shame and guilt of sin and the knowledge that our faith is weak and that we should be doing better, no wonder we often have such doubts.

Yet God knows all of this, dear Christian. He knows every one of your fears and doubts, for there was a time when He faced all of them Himself. That's why in His Word He reminds you how His blood has cleansed you from all unrighteousness, how He'll never leave nor forsake those who are His, and how all things work to the good for those whose trust is stayed in Him. Jesus, dear children of God, Jesus knows all your weaknesses and is acquainted with every one of your burdens. That's why He has invited you to put all these things on His shoulders to carry. Indeed in your weakness, Christ's strength is made manifest as He comes to you in His Word, in Holy Baptism, and in the Supper of His own true body and blood. Our Savior knows what you're all about. That's why He comes to you to give you His strength, comfort and peace. Through Word and Sacrament, the very Lord of life freely gives Himself to you – not in some abstract, ethereal way, but in ways you can see, touch, taste and feel. He does this because such is His promise – that is, that He will keep all those who have been given to Him, so that none who believe in Him will be lost.

*This* great faith, born of God, given by God, sustained by God, and built up by God – this has all been accomplished for you so that you might rightly place your trust only in Him who gave for us lost, fallen sinners everything He had to give. This is the One in whom you can confidently place your trust, for as the Scriptures everywhere attest, the one who has placed their trust in Jesus will never be put to shame. Dear child of God, this is His unbreakable promise to you – and God never goes back on a promise. You can count on it. God has said it – and that settles it. In Jesus' name, that settles it for time and all eternity! Amen.