

Pastor T.C. Arnold
3rd Sunday after Epiphany
Matthew 8:5-13
January 22nd, 2017

“Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof.”

The Centurion was right, you know. Here is this man who was given great power and authority over others. He says a word and the people under him listen and obey. That’s enough to make someone feel especially important. But standing before his Lord, even with all this compassion for his servant, he was unworthy. The request he made to Jesus was an unworthy request. And, most of all, the centurion knew it. And you know what else, so did the Savior.

But then the Savior points out what made the man worthy to ask such a thing. What makes him worthy was not his status as a man of great authority. It wasn’t because he was acting unselfishly by asking something not for himself but for another. It wasn’t because this centurion was a great man of valor, did good things for others, and lived a holy life. None of that made him worthy.

What made him worthy is what Jesus points to in the text. Jesus said, *“Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith.”* What made the centurion worthy was the fact Jesus was worthy. In other words, with faith, we have Christ. With faith, we are counted as His very own. With faith, the heavenly Father looks at us and sees the worthiness of His Son – because the Son’s got us... and we got the Son!

Have you ever heard someone say words like, “I got this,” and immediately you know that they do? If there was ever a way that “I got this” could be said without a doubt, without question, and, that word at the end changed from, “I got THIS” to, “I got YOU,” we could be confident that only someone like God – that is God HIMSELF could say and promise such a thing and it would be undoubtedly true. For the Centurion it was, “I’ve got you and I’ve got your servant.” And what a promise this is even in the face of what the Centurion spoke to be true. Do you remember what he said? *“Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof...”*

The Centurion was right, you know. He didn’t deserve it. And if we were the ones saying this very thing while standing before the Savior... even if we were selflessly asking for the sake of someone else... we do not deserve to have Jesus in our house. For crying out loud, we do not even deserve to have Him here in this place – present for us right in His Holy House. Nothing can make us worthy – not an important job, not our faithful worship... nothing.

Look around you, beloved in the Lord. This world has changed and it keeps on changing. One of the great illustrations of need in all the Scriptures occurs in this text. This text demonstrates what we need more than perhaps we realize. And, on top of that, this text shows us that today, people rely on the opposite of what we truly need. This is where everything is falling apart. This is the path of our world and we are doomed if we follow suit.

This is what I mean. The Centurion shows us two, yes two vital things that all of us in this day and age need... but often times we think we don’t. The first is faith. Total dependence of Christ in matters of our needs both in this life and the next. The second is community – the need for each other. God blesses us with both things and both things are gifts. But this world we live in today – maybe members of our own families – maybe even us – don’t think so much of either.

Of course, we Christians know that the first thing the Centurion shows – faith – is important. But faith in what? Well, faith that totally depends on Christ who keeps his promise that we can depend on Him for all we need. This includes all we need for heaven. So, that means, when we sin, we repent. We turn toward our God who takes away sins. And then, we live as people who have faith that God’s Words are true. We are kind to others, we put others first, we serve no other gods – including our stuff. Faith in Christ totally depends on Him for life and salvation. He didn’t do “most” of the work on the cross for you. No,

He did all of it. All your sins were there. And this is good news! So repent and believe on His Holy Name. The Centurion shows us what this kind of faith looks like and Jesus calls it out.

The second thing that the Centurion shows us that we desperately need community. Today, we don't live in a "community" world. We live in a "me first", and "me only" world. Individualism is our god. My truth is right for me and you have no right to impose "your truth". So, I don't care what the community believes. I don't care what the community wants. I don't even care what the community can do. I have me and all I need is me. Don't get up in my business with your rules and tell me what I can do with "my" body – or – what I should be doing for someone else. Everything for my life is totally up to me.

The plague of individualism leaves our neighbor without community and support. Individualism dismisses the call to serve and the call to depend on the love and support of others. Individualism takes something that was given at the beginning of time, that showed the whole people of Israel how God would protect and guide through water, war, and whatever else severely challenged God's children, that showed us a child in the manger, a ministry begun in the Jordan, miracles that gave health and life, and most importantly, a terrible suffering on a cross for the sake of the sins of the world. Individualism says we need none of that. I've got me.

Beloved, God built community. The Centurion knew he needed the help of another. The servant in the house of the Centurion could not just rely on himself to become well. Community is a gift of God for each of us individually and for the sake of the church on earth.

This past week 7 high school students (including my son, Benjamin) from Lutheran High and 3 adult chaperons journeyed to Camp LuWiSoMo, an LCMS camp in Wisconsin, to lead a week of devotions, singing, crafts, and games for special needs campers. Working with people who have special needs is challenging work – it can be unpredictable work. One wonders what they are comprehending – what they are "getting out" of all the hard work a person puts into preparation and effort. With those who can't think like you and me, we wonder what good is it to have a "thoughtful" devotion or sings songs they probably don't understand anyway.

When these thoughts occur, we forget about two things... faith (and what it is) and community. Let us not forget that God's grace and His faith are gifts that do not depend on how well your brain works. He comes from outside of us to make us who we are – loved, forgiven, His very own child. And anyone with a disability is as much a child of God as any of us. Anyone with a disability has what God provides in His grace through faith as any of us. This person is not just an "individual" who might or might not be able to cognitively connect all the dots in a Bible Study. They are, for sure, however, a child of God who is receiving the active Word – and we will rely on that – because God is the giver.

And secondly, if you don't believe in the importance of community, then you have never worked at a camp. Leaders rely on each other. Campers rely on the leaders. Caregivers depend on help and support from others. And all of us, no matter where we are, depend on one another for prayer and provisions.

Today we celebrate life Sunday. Life depends on another. There is no such thing as a completely autonomous human being. For survival, community is vital – others are needed. Whether we are talking about the unborn, the very old, or the cognitively impaired, all belong to Christ and all depend on what He gives. All need a community built by Christ for support, love, help, and nourishment.

One last thing – now you see how important the community of the church is. That's why we call it a parish-family. We are people who need each other. God has brought us together in this place according to His will and not by accident. We will always need God to give us what we can't do for ourselves – salvation. See how He gathers us together to give us what we need – His life-giving Word and Sacraments. See how He has given us each other. We are a family. We are His family. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.