

*The Second Sunday After Pentecost*

June 6, 2010

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 7:1-10

***When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. 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." So Jesus went with them. 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. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But 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." 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." Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well. (NIV)***

My wife Lisa called a major phone company to let them know the date we would be moving into our apartment in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. *"No problem, Mrs. Wilke your phone line will be ready and activated on Tuesday when you arrive."* But that Tuesday came, we moved into our apartment, plugged in our phones, and no signal. So Lisa called again. *"Sorry, Mrs. Wilke, we will make sure we have you connected by Friday."* But Friday came, we tried our phones and still nothing. So again Lisa comes to our church at the time and calls, and she hears: *"By Monday we will have your lines up and running."* But Monday morning came and maybe by now you can guess the outcome - no phone. So Lisa gets to make yet another call and again they say *"We are so sorry Mrs. Wilke, by Wednesday we promise we will have your phone line ready."* But at that point what good is their word? How much confidence and trust would you place in their promises?

We live in a world full of empty words and promises, don't we? Perhaps that is why we can at times be so skeptical. That's why advertisers will try to do everything to tell you they are offering guarantees or their sure fire seal of approval. That is why advisors will tell you to make sure you get it in writing. It is hard to take someone at their word because too many promises get broken. Even people with the best intentions do not have the power to always keep their word. The busy father tells his kids: *"I promise I will take you to the park on Saturday when I have some time."* But all Saturday he watches helplessly as the rain continues to pour down and ruin any chance of him keeping his word to his children. So what good is a person's word? What confidence can we have in promises any more?

Dear friends, isn't it comforting to know there is One whose word is always good? How reassuring it is to have a Savior whose promises never fail us! It is my prayer this morning that we have full confidence, and that our hearts are filled with

complete trust in Jesus. I pray that the Holy Spirit would work on us as He did in the heart of the centurion so that we have faith, a great faith that says: **Just say the word Jesus.**

Why would someone turn to Jesus and proclaim: *“Just give me your Word and that is enough for me?”* Let’s turn to our text. Jesus enters Capernaum, a city located on the western side of the sea of Galilee and often the home base for Jesus’ ministry. Jesus had just finished teaching a great multitude of people. The last lesson He taught was the one who hears His Word and puts it into practice is like a wise builder who builds his house on the rock. Now such a man sends Jesus some messengers. A Roman centurion - a captain of 100 soldiers has someone who is dear to him sick and about to die. So he sends some elders of the Jews to Jesus because He has heard of Jesus and heard enough to place his trust in Jesus. Evidently, this centurion had become a believer and even provided the Jews a place to worship the one true God.

So when these messengers *“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.’”* You can tell the kind of man this Gentile centurion is by the fact that these messengers, these Jewish messengers spoke so well of him and pleaded on his behalf. Yet, what they base their request on is pretty off the mark here, isn’t it? What did this centurion really deserve from Jesus? Because he was good to the Jewish people and even built a synagogue, does that mean Jesus owed this man something? Did he deserve to have this servant healed because he was such a nice guy?

Do we ever think this way? Maybe we are generous givers, diligent workers, and faithful Christians who even hear from others how good we are and what they think we deserve from God for our goodness. Do we ever start to believe it? Do we ever start to think that Jesus owes us something? Do ever begin, even a little, imagining that we have somehow earned something from God? *“I do this and that for the Lord, I come to church every week, so the least Jesus can do is take away my sickness or disease.”* That, dear friends, is a very dangerous way of thinking because God does not owe you or me a thing. Actually, the Lord does owe us something - punishment - death. For that is what our sins deserve.

While Jesus did not owe this centurion a thing either, in love, *“Jesus went with them.”* As other friends of this centurion approach Jesus, their message reveals that this centurion has a far different attitude about what He thinks he deserves. His friends relay this message to Jesus: *“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.”* Did you hear the message? *“I do not deserve. I did not consider myself worthy.”* This is the only proper attitude for a sinner to have before a holy God. The centurion does not make the request based on himself, but on what he knows about Jesus. He comes to Jesus with a humble faith.

While commentators say that perhaps this man is trying to spare Jesus the disgrace of becoming unclean by going into the home of a Gentile, our text points out another reason this centurion tells Jesus not to bother by coming all the way to his house. It is a wonderful, marvelous reason. Did you catch it when the lesson was read? The centurion simply says, *“But say the word, and my servant will be healed.”* He says: *“Just say the word, Jesus.”* He believed that word was all that was needed. He was confident that if Jesus said it, it would be done. What trust and confidence in Jesus!

*"Just say the word, Jesus."* He added, *"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."* The centurion had faith that Jesus had authority as God to speak the word and his servant would be well.

Now it was the Savior, who again and again amazed the people, who was amazed. Jesus marveled at what He saw in this man's heart and *"turning to the crowd following him, he said, 'I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.'*" Not even among God's chosen people of Israel did Jesus find such an example of trust in Him. And of course, this centurion's faith in Jesus did not fail him. The men who were sent returned to find that Jesus' word was all that was needed. The servant was healed. Matthew records that the servant was healed at the very hour that Jesus spoke the words to the centurion: *"Go! It will be done just as you believed it would."* (8)

What about us? Do we have a *"just say the word Jesus"* attitude? Do we trust in His power and promises? When we think about it we have heard more about Jesus than this centurion because we have the word of the prophets made more certain. What do we know about Jesus that would give us the confidence and faith to proclaim *"just say the word Jesus?"* Everything we have ever known about the Son of God gives us reason for such a faith, doesn't it? Not a single one of Jesus' words, not a one of God's promises have ever failed. So when Jesus says my righteousness, my perfect life, is your righteousness - given to you in your baptism. We can reply just say the word Jesus. When Jesus says His suffering and death on the cross were for our sins, that his blood shed purifies us from every sin; when Jesus says our sins are forgiven. Just say the word Jesus. When Jesus said destroy this temple, this body, and in three days I will raise it again. We found out on Easter why we could believe just say the word Jesus.

So when you get tired of hearing empty words and promises - go to the Word you can always, always count on. This Word promises us God works for our good in every situation, that His angels will guard us in all our ways, that not even death can separate us from God's love for us in Jesus, and that in prayer we will always have a Father in heaven who hears and answers us. His Word promises a place for us that Jesus is preparing even now, and that Jesus will come and take us so that we may be in heaven where He is. May the Holy Spirit work in our hearts this great faith of the centurion that simply trusts *"just say the word Jesus"* and it will be done. After all, a Savior that already made good on His Word to suffer and bleed and die to pay for my sin is a Savior whose Word is certainly good enough for me. Amen.