**Luke 7:1-10 (ESV)**

After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. **2** Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. **3** When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. **4** And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, **5** for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.” **6** And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. **7** Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. **8** For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: 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.” **9** When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” **10** And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

**“Just Say The Word…”**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. A famous saying from during the time of World War II was to remark, “There are no atheists in foxholes.” Sitting down in a hole with bullets and bombs flying overhead really gives no other option than to believe in God. This may be true with how God works by the Law to reveal the sorry state of our affairs in a sinful world. However, only the Gospel creates and gives faith to know and trust in Jesus Christ. No disaster or darkness ever has the power to bring this good news. It resides alone in the Word of Jesus who said to His disciples on the night he was betrayed, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me” (John 14:1).

Here is the key for understanding our text from St. Luke today. Here was a man not of lawlessness, but very much about law and order as governed by Rome. To be a centurion, a commander of 100 soldiers, meant he had integrity, a high character, fought in the frontlines, and treasured discipline. With the unexpected event over a valued servant falling ill. It likely seemed to be one more occasion for another body bag. Yet, someone said something to him that changed everything about the course of these events. St. Luke reveals what made all the difference telling us, “When the centurion heard about Jesus…” How potent is the good news from the Father that rests for all in His Son. At the heart of what Jesus gives of His gifts is for Him just to say the Word.

By the word of the Centurion, he sent elders of the Jews to speak to the One he heard about. The man was smart enough to know a Gentile like him had no real status in Jewish circles. Maybe even seen as an offense to some. At least, that is the reason for the display put on by those pleading before Jesus. They tried to elevate the centurion to a standard worthy enough to receive the desired response. What greater statement could be made than to say, “…he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue.” This was not a mere love for Israel being God’s people from Old Testament times, but also love in action that helped to construct the very place of worship in Capernaum. Such praise worthy words might work before men, but not before the Word become flesh come to save sinners. Jesus said nothing at that moment because there was no need for Him as Savior. The best we get is the simple line, “And Jesus went with them.”

How easily does worthiness hinder us to hear anything from Jesus. Everything has a value placed on it today. If not in dollar signs then with our time, and not our time then in what we talk about with others. Part of the battle with gay marriage rests on the argument that they are good and loving people. Isn’t this the same reason others give for living together without marriage? Isn’t this the way many want to look at funerals for those absent from the church? Isn’t this the sad reality faced by us all when trying to win Christ over by works of the Law? This is the danger constantly threatening the Gospel. St. Paul said, “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.” Our Lutheran Fathers put it this way, “We for our part preach the foolishness of the Gospel, which reveals another righteousness…We know how repulsive this teaching is to the judgment of reason and law and that the teaching of the law about love is more plausible; for this is human wisdom” (Tappert 139:230). When worthiness gets in the way Jesus might go with us, but we still hear no saving Word.

The remarkable fact of the centurion is how he came to his senses to believe in the Gospel. Before Jesus reached the house, the soldier sent friends to meet the Savior laying it all on the line. “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.” It was a standoff. Jesus the Holy One of God should not come to him and he the unholy sinner should not come to Jesus. The only solution was in the same redeeming message he heard about from the start. “By faith the centurion commands the Lord to command by His Word” (Bul’s notes). It was more than a repentant faith that looked to Christ to save. This man understood the power of His Word to be greater than his own or that of any man. The place of God’s presence in the temple now resided in Jesus, who is Savior and Lord. As Solomon prayed would happen, “…do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you…”

How quickly does faith respond to hear better words from Jesus. When many today prance into the Lord’s house with whatever works of “love” they want to glorify. The time of corporate confession tears it all down to be like the Centurion. It is to admit we are the outsider. Separated from God and deserving judgment by the Law means we lay it all on the line before Jesus. Our words of worthiness die in thought, word, and deed and the promising Word given by baptism is to speak. As St. Paul says, “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life (Romans 5:10). The only lifeline for faith is in Jesus’ Word. He alone has the authority to answer our prayer we had this morning. “O God, by Your almighty Word You set in order all things in heaven and on earth. Put away from us all things hurtful, and give us those things that are beneficial for us.” In other words, just say the Word Lord Jesus and let your servants be healed. Forgiveness for sinners and healing for life go hand and hand in God’s Son.

Healing the centurion’s servant was more of an aftershock to the more shocking Word. St. Luke tells us, “When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.’” Just to keep things straight, Jesus also had a similar reaction to the unbelief He found in his hometown of Nazareth (Mark 6:6). Faith then is a gift worked by God as the greatest miracle by the Gospel. It is the most treasured glory Jesus gives to any to repent and believe in Him. The nature of faith does not exist in man as being something of our achievement, no less than it did with the centurion. It must come from the Word and remain in the Word. This is the Word centering upon Jesus who bore our sin and death and by His cross changed everything. This is the humble confidence that can look beyond all that separates us from Him, since He “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.”

How generously does hopefulness abound when hearing words from Jesus. What is unworthy becomes worthy as promised by baptism into His Name. There are no guarantees of healing be it for a frail body or the battle against a sinful flesh. Yet, the greater miracle is to believe Jesus’ Word. He speaks to save with forgiveness, life, and salvation. If it were not for such absolution, confession would keep us away from Christ but the voice of His ministry declares, “I forgive you ALL your sins.” Just as the gift of the Lord’s Supper is where Jesus proves that God wants to take up residence in the lives of His Holy people by His sacrifice. Even though the centurion knew he was unworthy, others saw him as worthy. His honorable life now led to honoring Jesus whose Word did save him and his household. May we hold up a worthy love to others as well, so it serves finally to confess a good word of faith in the love of God hidden in the Gospel. At the heart of what Jesus gives of His gifts is for Him just to say the Word. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.