

Text: Luke 7:1-10.

Second Sunday after Pentecost.

**May 29, 2016.**

Grace and peace are yours through Jesus. Amen.

We're not worthy. We're not worthy. Sorry, but I'm a man in my 40's. When I hear those words, I think of Wayne and Garth from an old Saturday Night Live sketch. They would yell the words, repeatedly, "We're not worthy," when they saw a celebrity. Maybe lead singer from Aerosmith, Steven Tyler, or Madonna. I'm not condoning the lifestyles and actions of those celebrities, but those words, "We're not worthy," can often ring in our own minds. Would you say those words if you were in the presence of the president? What about Jesus himself? Then would you think, "We're not worthy?" What would Jesus say to you? Would he say, "You're not worthy?" Let's see.

We meet a man who in every earthly sense would seem worthy. He was a centurion. This was a soldier in charge of about 100 men. The centurions were the backbone of the great Roman army. And every centurion we meet in the Bible was a man of noble character. This guy tops on the list.

He had great respect for his servants, which was not normal in those days. He valued this servant highly. He cared for him deeply. The centurion was so distressed at this servant's seemingly terminal illness, he sent elders of the Jews to Jesus, asking Jesus to heal his servant. It was very strange that a Gentile, in the Roman army, would have any contact with Jews, let alone have enough respect by the Jews, that the elders would go on his behalf and talk to Jesus. Ok, we just can't imagine how strange that was.

And what's most shocking is that the Jewish elders had respect for this Gentile. The Jewish elders had nothing but good to say about this centurion. They called him worthy! This man deserves to have you do this. Deserves to have you do this? Name one other time in the Bible that Jews said a Gentile deserved something good, anything good from Jesus. They went out of their way to say, "He loves our nation." This word for nation was not the normal word the Jews used to talk about themselves. This word nation was usually reserved for those Gentiles. In fact, we get our word heathen from this word for nation. The Jews calling themselves heathen? When did you hear that? And the Jews quickly point out. This man, he himself, built our synagogue! When did a Gentile help build or finance a Jewish synagogue? Come on, Jesus. He loves us. He built our synagogue. He deserves to have you do this. He certainly is worthy.

We might point out this centurion was following the words from the book of Proverbs, chapter 27, verse 2. "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth." And yet, in spite of all this earthly evidence of his worthiness, brought by the Jewish leaders themselves, this centurion did not consider himself worthy.

For one thing, the centurion never addressed Jesus directly. The centurion sent the elders, then some friends. The centurion did not consider himself worthy to come to Jesus. He built the church and he didn't consider himself worthy? He called Jesus Lord, capital L. Don't trouble yourself. I don't want to be a bother. I don't want this to be skin off your back. Lord, you have other people more important than I. I'm not worthy. I don't deserve to have you come under my roof. Now, he likely was aware that a Jew could not enter the home of a Gentile without being defiled and ceremonially unclean. But you have to think this centurion was concerned about something deeper. The centurion knew his sin. The centurion knew, "I'm not worthy! Jesus I don't want to trouble you with coming to my house. I'm not good enough."

Jesus, I'm just a guy. Things are set up so that I have people with authority over me. I have to take their orders and do what they say, even if they are not present. And Jesus, I have such a tiny amount of

authority. I have maybe 100 guys who will go when I say go and come when I say come. But Jesus, I have no authority compared to you. You can just say the word and my servant will be healed. You don't have to be present for your orders to be carried out. You have authority over everything: sickness, suffering, even life and death. Jesus, I'm not worthy.

Would his confession be your confession? I'm not worthy? But Jesus, I'm a nice person. I treat people with respect. Just ask anybody. They'll tell you. But Jesus, I helped build this church, with my own hands, up to the elbow in tile grout, with my own face, covered in paint, with my own time and offerings. Doesn't that count for something? Doesn't that make me a little worthy? It's Memorial Day weekend. I'm here. Doesn't that make me better than all the people out camping and fishing and boating and up at cabins? Are we worthy? Not with sinful thoughts like that!

And yet, and yet, and yet, Jesus says, "You are worthy." I baptized you because your sins needed a good washing. Your soul needed a good healing. That self-righteous sinner in you needed to be dunked and drowned. So I dunked him under and drowned him for good. You are worthy, look at my hands. I endured these nails wounds for you, to declare you holy, perfect, free from sin, worthy! Look at my empty tomb. Yours will be empty, too, empty of your body, empty of death and filled with eternal life.

Jesus did a one of a kind thing here. Literally, only once in the whole Bible did Jesus do what he does here. He was amazed at the centurion's faith. Only once was Jesus amazed at faith and it was this time here. Wow! Can I just say that again, because you won't find this any other place in the entire Bible! Jesus was amazed at the faith of the centurion.

What was so amazing about his faith? The humility of his faith. Don't trouble yourself. I don't deserve. I did not consider myself worthy. A humble faith is amazing. Even when he had every earthly reason to feel worthy, he knew he wasn't. His faith was humble because he knew his sin. His faith was humble because he knew he wasn't worthy.

His faith was also amazing because it trusted in Jesus' word. Just say the word and my servant will be healed. Just say the word. You don't have to be present. You don't have to make some big show and call down lightning. Just say the word. What a model for our faith. Just say the word. Jesus I don't need to be magically transported to your cross to know I'm forgiven. Just say the word and I'll believe, "I am forgiven." I don't need some magic show where you appear for me to know you are with me. You gave me your body and blood. You said the word, "This is my body." That's good enough for me. I'm not worthy to receive your body. But I trust your word and I take it gladly.

The third thing amazing about his faith was the complete confidence in Jesus. The centurion wasn't trusting the elders to put in a good word for him and that would make him worthy. The centurion wasn't counting on the long list of good works others might have considered important. The centurion's faith was focused solely and totally on Jesus. It wasn't a vague faith in some nameless God. It was a confident faith, placed in a powerful Lord, Jesus. You know, there's this idea floating around today, "Hey, every faith is good. Just believe something and be sincere and true to the faith you have chosen." But that wasn't the amazing faith of the centurion. His amazing faith had a more amazing object: Jesus! And it was the object of his faith, Jesus, that made his faith worth anything.

Finally, it's the object of your faith, not the size of it that matters. Sorry to take you back to earlier than Wayne and Garth, all the way to the 1970's and the show Love Boat. You can tell from the title what the

show was about, right? Anyway, one episode featured a couple celebrating a 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. The wife always wanted to take a cruise. The husband couldn't swim and was terrified to step on a ship. Problem. The solution? He wore a life vest. All the time. Never went close to the edge of the ship. People talked to him and tried to convince him. Finally, they wore him down. At the end of the episode, big, dramatic moment. He throws the life vest overboard. One of the crew takes a peek and notices, "The life vest sank!" What good was all his "faith" in the life vest? Would the huge "faith" he had in the life vest have saved him? Not for one second.

But faith in Jesus saves. Faith in Jesus is amazing. In fact, there's something else really shocking about this part of the Bible: Jesus' miracle of healing fades into the background. It's the miracle of faith that takes center stage. Usually the preacher would get scolded for drawing attention away from Jesus' miracle and putting the focus on the reaction of the people. But here, Jesus himself draws attention to the amazing faith of the centurion. Jesus himself was amazed at the centurion's faith. Jesus goes out of his way to say, "I have not found such great faith even in Israel." The miracle to focus on wasn't the miracle that healed the body of the servant. The miracle to focus on was the miracle that healed the soul of the centurion. That miracle was faith in Jesus.

Yes, faith in Jesus is the miracle that heals the soul. Faith in Jesus is the greatest miracle he ever did for you. Faith in Jesus leads me to say, "Lord, I'm not worthy. But you said, 'I am worthy.' So I'm going to listen to you, put my complete confidence in your word." Yes, I am worthy. Jesus said so. Yes, I am worthy. Jesus bled so. Yes, I am worthy. Amen.