

Wednesday in Trinity XI
LTS Chapel

19 August 2015
Tshwane, South Africa

Preaching Text: Luke 7:1-10

Psalm 34

Hymn: "Baptismal Waters Cover Me" -616 LSB

Give us, O Lord, ears to hear and hearts to believe your Holy Word that repenting of our sins we might trust your merciful absolution and live in the peace and joy which you have won for us by your bitter passion, innocent death, and victorious resurrection. Hear us, O Jesus. Amen.

Today's text has to do with a military man. He was centurion to be more specific, that is, a Roman commander in charge of one hundred soldiers. We might not often think of it like this, but the soldier is an apt biblical image of the pastor, the preacher of God's Word. After all, the Apostle Paul says Timothy is to endure suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (II Tim. 2:3) and that he is to "fight the good fight of faith" (I Tim. 6:11). Or in Ephesians 6, Paul admonishes us to be strong in the Lord, putting on the whole armor of God and taking up the divine weaponry to do battle not against flesh and blood but against the cosmic forces of darkness which assail those who belong to Christ.

So this morning, we look at this centurion as a model for those who would be pastors in the Lord's church. What can we learn from him about the life of faith and faithfulness in the office of Christ's under-shepherd?

Recall what happens. The centurion has a highly-valued servant who was dying. This nameless officer was not a Jew; he was Roman. But he certainly had the respect of his Jewish friends. So the elders of the synagogue implore Jesus on this noble centurion's behalf. He is worthy, Jesus, for he loves our nation and he built our synagogue. Jesus does not dispute their claim or reject their intercession. He goes with him. But as they make their way to the centurion's house, the officer sends messengers to Jesus: "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof... just say the word and my servant will be healed."

The centurion explains himself. I am a man set under authority and have soldiers under my authority. I say to one "come" and he comes and to another "go" and he goes. I say to one under my command, "Do this" and it is done. Just say the word, Lord, and my servant will be healed.

Jesus marveled at this man's faith saying not even in Israel have I found such faith. It is only this man and the Canaanite woman who pleaded with Jesus to heal her daughter that Jesus commends for having great faith. Both were non-Jews, Gentiles who were strangers to the promises and covenants of God. They had great faith for they had a great Savior who gives Himself to all who trust in His Word. The centurion's son is healed by the Lord who came to give His life as a ransom for the sins of the whole world, the weak and powerful, the Jew and the Gentile, the worthy and the unworthy. They are all embraced by His reconciling sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. And so are you.

But now back to my original question. What might we learn from the centurion as those who would be good soldiers of Jesus Christ?

First, like the centurion, we are men under authority. To be a shepherd in Christ's church is to be sent by the Lord Jesus Christ just as he authorized His apostles to forgive and retain sins in His stead and by His

command. We are never independent operators, self—appointed agents doing our own thing. We are under the authority of the one Lord and Master, the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ to whom all authority in heaven and on earth is given. The only words we have to speak are His words. The only promises we have to declare are His promises.

Second, like the centurion, we are not worthy. No one is put into the pastoral office because he is worthy. It is not a matter of entitlement. It is nothing that we can claim for ourselves. Like the centurion, we are completely dependent on the mercy and grace of the One who made Himself the friend of sinners. He speaks His Word and we are healed. We can only confess with the centurion: “I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.”

That is our declaration today as we come before the Lord’s altar in this service of confession and absolution. We come not boasting of an entitlement to the forgiveness of sins but as those who confess our complete and total depravity. There is no merit we may plead before God other than the blood and righteousness of His Son who carried our sins to death on the cross and was raised again for our justification. We come only because we know that the Lord who invites us is the Lord who has authority from His Father to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. “Let it be done to you as you believe.” Amen.

-Prof. John T. Pless+