

TEXT: Luke 7:2-9

THEME: Great Faith Is Amazing!

1. Great Faith Values Others
2. Great Faith Is Evident to Others
3. Great Faith Is Humble

Dear Christian Friends:

Leo Tolstoy, the author of *War and Peace*, had a very sensitive conscience. As a wealthy landowner in Russia in the 1800s, he freed the serfs that were bound to his land. He sold his possessions. He lived humbly because he wanted to do God's will. But he was estranged from his wife and children. His generosity came at their expense; he provided for others, but not his own family. Those on the outside may have thought Tolstoy was a man of great faith. Those closest to him saw his life was filled with misery and great fear of God.

Today we are focusing on an encounter Jesus had with a man whose faith amazed Jesus. His great faith is evident in his confidence that Jesus needed only to speak the word and his servant would be healed. But if we look more closely, we see his great faith evident in other ways as well. Do you suppose that this man's great faith was evident to his household? Or was he like Tolstoy? Did others brag of the greatness of his faith while his own family thought differently?

#### GREAT FAITH VALUES OTHERS

Notice that our text refers to **“a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly.”**

The servant was only a slave in the household of a powerful man, but that powerful man valued his servant. That's what people of great faith do. They value others around them. Each soul is precious to them because each soul is precious to the Savior.

Are you a person of such great faith? As we encounter the great faith of the centurion, we see the weakness of our own. How many times have we failed to value the people around us...those who don't look like us, those who don't dress like us, those who don't smell like us? Jesus values us...even though we are not holy like him, even though we are sinners, even though we lack faith. In his mercy, Jesus even died for our lack of faith. Through his Word and Sacrament, he wants to strengthen our faith so that we will value all those around us, especially the weak and homeless.

It is not always easy to show our faith, especially when what we have to offer may not be wanted. The Roman centurion was familiar with that. People in the military may be familiar with serving in nations where many people resent their presence. Roman soldiers knew that resentment. How many hostile glances did the Roman soldiers encounter as they patrolled the streets of Capernaum? Yet, the elders of the Jews said of the Roman commander, **“He loves our nation.”** What an amazing thing! The centurion acted in such a way that those who were inclined to hate him had to say, “He loves us!”

That love showed itself in a practical way. **“He has built our synagogue.”** That implies wealth on the part of the centurion. But wealth alone does not make a person generous. Faith in the Savior does. The centurion’s generosity was evidence of his great faith.

#### GREAT FAITH IS EVIDENT TO OTHERS

Do the people who might have a natural hostility toward you see you as having great faith? Do they see that you love them? There are often disagreements in a family of believers, like our Christian congregation. Even though you disagree with others, do they see that you love them?

As Christians living in the world, we are going to rub shoulders with others who have very different standards of behavior than we do. A church member mentioned that most of the members of the sports team he plays on use foul language. He was wondering what he should do. The great faith of the centurion gives us an answer. Though they may be hostile to you because you are a Christian, let them see your faith in your love for them in spite of their sin. Offer help with no strings attached. Put their needs before your own.

That’s what Jesus has done for us. He came to a hostile world. He loved those who hated him. He died for them. He prayed, **“Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).** May we be like him. May our faith be evident to all!

GREAT FAITH IS HUMBLE. But be careful that you do not become proud of what YOU do! **“This man deserves to have you do this.”** That was the way the elders of the Jews saw the situation. Because of what the centurion had done, they thought he deserved Jesus’ special attention, that he had earned God’s favor.

This unnamed centurion had a different view. He admitted he was not worthy to have Jesus come to his home. He was not worthy even of going to speak to Jesus in person. What would lead a person to say this? Was this a false humility? If so, Jesus would have seen through it. What made this centurion a humble man? We aren’t told here, but from accounts in the rest of the Bible, we know.

In the account of the Pharisee and the tax collector, the tax collector wouldn’t even look up to heaven but beat his breast and pleaded for God’s mercy. Why? **“God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13).** When Jesus gave Peter a great catch of fish, he pleaded with Jesus to leave him! Why? **“I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8).** This kind of humility comes from seeing two things clearly. The first is to see clearly that the one we are coming to meet is the holy God. The second is to see clearly our own sin and shame.

Let others brag about your righteousness. As you approach the Holy One, come as one who understands God’s law. “I am a sinner. I am unworthy. I don’t deserve to come into your presence.”

But great faith doesn’t stop with the knowledge of sin against the holy God. It holds on to Jesus, with whom there is infinite mercy. Great faith holds on to this truth: **“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).** Jesus welcomes the requests of us unworthy sinners who have faith in him. So, in faith, keep looking up to Jesus! Amen.

## Prayer of the Church—Pentecost 2C

Lord Jesus, as we encounter the great faith of the centurion, we see the weakness of our own. How many times have we failed to value the people around us? Lord Jesus, forgive us for our lack of faith. You value us, sinners though we are. In your mercy you died for our lack of faith. Now help us value those around us, especially the weak and helpless.

Lord Jesus, it hurts to compare ourselves with this centurion. Those who are opposed to us may question if our love for them is sincere. Lord Jesus, our guilt is great, but your forgiveness is greater. We trust that you love us and generously gave yourself for us. Now, Lord, make us like you—not to our glory, but to your glory. Grant us a faith that magnifies you.

Lord Jesus, keep us mindful who you are: the holy God. Keep us mindful who we are: sinners undeserving of your grace and love. In humility, we come to you with our requests. Let us know your forgiving love. Hear our private prayers for our family and friends.

*Silent prayer.*

Lord Jesus, grant each of us a great faith in your love and in your power so that we might be a blessing not only to those around us today but for all generations after us. We ask this in your name, who has taught us to pray:

### THE LORD'S PRAYER