

Is God in Charge

Scripture: Luke 7: 1-10
Date: February 2, 2020

INTRODUCTION

ZION CRC YOUTH SERVICE

In 1995, I lead my first every Christian Reformed Church Youth Service. It was both amazing and awful !! The pre-service chaos was massive with worship teams still practicing, drama teams going through their paces all with pre-lude music blaring from the speakers !!

EPIPHANY 2020

This church season is Epiphany in a journey that is looking for clarity and revelation. Now in this youth service – if you were over 25 for that worship experience – you might have not seen any clarity – only the chaos. If you were over 25 and looking for vision or understanding – you would have shift out of linear and normal gear. In fact – you might have been a bit afraid walking in that night with all those young people running around – shouting and laughing with boundless energy.

FEAR

UNKNOWN

There was a lot of unknown in that youth service as I'd never lead a 'proper' youth service and they'd never seen one of my 'normal' youth services.

But truthfully there's a lot in this life that's also unknown - unknown and scary

- Earlier in January an Iranian missile shot down a passenger airplane killing all 176 passengers – including 57 Canadians.
- This past week – a retired NBA player named Kobe Bryant – died in a helicopter accident along with his young daughter
- Currently much of China and increasingly parts of the global community is wrestling with the Wuhan Corona virus

Each of these incidents are only a portion of the broken, painfilled, sorrow ridden world in which we live. Sometimes you want to know something – go somewhere BUT you just can't sort out the details, you just can't figure out the puzzle and you just don't know who to follow on this journey.

There is much the science and technology of our world can tell us - there is also much that it can't. This gap is a mystery that creates fear of the unknown for many of us.

UNABLE

But even when we do know some of the answers to the mystery – it doesn't always mean that we're able to finish the puzzle. Cancer victims can take treatment – but it doesn't always mean a cure. The death of a loved one can have a funeral but it doesn't

mean that healing happens. Knowing that the car is broken doesn't mean you know how to fix it – much less how to pay for the repairs !!

Sometimes the greatest fear is knowing something needs doing but knowing you can't because the problem is just too big and sometimes the response is too uncertain with no guarantees and you won't try because it's just not worth it.

UNCONTROLLABLE

The world is chaotic and we are people who want to control it. We live in a world defined by control – from our tech remotes to our smart phones to our wifi and Bluetooth devices. We can schedule our lives from distances and detachments but when the science goes wrong or when the technology goes off we lose control. This often results in fear

TEXT - CENTURION

In our text today – we are introduced to a centurion. This centurion was not necessarily the type of a Roman military captain overseeing one hundred Roman soldiers given the location in the Capernaum outpost. But it is still likely that because of his station in life that he was still a person of influence, he was still a person of power and that he was still a person of persuasion.

But this centurion was not heartless and in fact was sympathetic to the nation of Israel and to the people of Capernaum. He had contributed to the well being of the nation of Israel and to the local community of Capernaum in the building of its synagogues.

The centurion was also compassionate to his staff. He also had a servant – a slave perhaps – that meant a lot to him. In fact this servant / slave was quite sick. Luke's account of the story indicates that the servant was very sick and near death and Matthew's account of the story indicates that there was paralysis and suffering terribly

Regardless, despite all the centurion's power and influence there was nothing he was able to do for this person. It was out of his control.

FAITH

HUMILITY

Yet the centurion's response was not driven by fear but rather by faith. In his context he was aware of this Jesus, His teachings, His miracles. Perhaps there was a hope for the servant / slave after all – not because the situation has changed but rather because it has become clearer.

The centurion was a man of importance and a man of power – yet he was powerless to help the servant / slave. IF there was a way to remedy the situation, he was determined to accomplish it.

In Luke's account the centurion sends the leaders of Capernaum to meet with Jesus and ask for his help in healing this servant / slave. But also, perhaps he simply recognizes his Gentile place in an Israel world – even if it was governed by the Romans. He knows his role and responsibility in the military but also knows that Jesus is greater than he.

HONOUR – PERSON

The centurion's humility of the situation and his place in the situation and this gives him a voice to reach out to Jesus. Addressing the authority that Jesus has over him, addressing the role that Jesus has in healing his servant, addressing the person that Jesus is. In verse 6 he acknowledges Jesus' greatness over him - *I do not deserve you to come under my roof* and in vs. 7 - *I don't consider myself worthy to come to you*. This Gentile soldier - of influence and power himself recognizes that there is one greater than he to deal with this situation

HONOUR – POWER

The Centurion submits to this in the next exchange. He has affirmed the person of Jesus and now he affirms the power of Jesus. He accepts Jesus' authority over him and now he seeks the action of Jesus for him. He is reaching out to Jesus not just because of WHO Jesus is but also WHAT Jesus can do

Jesus does not need to come to his house. This Jesus CAN do anything – anywhere / anyhow. The centurion recognizes that IF Jesus is a powerful presence then He doesn't need to be with the servant / slave to heal him. The presence and the power of God is not constrained to a time or a place. The centurion speaks the faith - *Say the word – the centurion says – and (I believe) it will happen*

FAITH

ZION CRC YOUTH SERVICE

Following the youth service one of the staff came to me with some observations. They confessed that when they walked into the sanctuary during the preservice chaos they had some serious reservations! They thought it was chaos and completely out of control. Then they saw me on stage – talking with the various groups and bringing some semblance of calm. They were trusting in who I was and trusting in what I could do. They didn't need to speak to me – they had faith in me

TEXT

Jesus upon hearing this declaration from the Gentile centurion turns and speaks to the Jewish crowd with Him and the Capernaum elders with Him declaring that He's not found such great faith – even in Israel.

In the Greek this phrase speaks to the amount of faith from the centurion. That this man of power and authority would trust in Jesus so much to heal his servant / slave. But the phrase also has a connotation to the uniqueness of the faith from the centurion. That a Gentile would get the person and the power of Christ much more than the Jews themselves would!

APPLICATION / CONCLUSION

CHAOS

In our uncontrolled, unwilling, unable chaos of 2020 we often find ourselves adrift, alienated and alone. We look around for answers – and questions - and find emptiness. We look up for answers – and questions – and find mystery.

We find ourselves asking the question - is God really in charge because nothing else seems to be in control – to be in charge ?? As a result - we find ourselves fearful, falling, and failing in our lives and in our faith.

CHRIST

But into this space we are reminded of the Christ - whose authority acts and whose presence heals with power. Into this space we are reminded that for all the chaos in this world - Christ remains.

For all the chaos we could choose to respond with fear but in and through Christ we are given the choice of faith. To declare that we might not know what the future holds – but that we know who holds the future. To let go and let God be in charge.

ROWAN MOBACH CONVERSATION

Today we had the privilege of baptising Rowan Mobach into our faith community - into the promises of God. Yet truthfully, we must confess to him that this is a scary time to live in this world. The changing climate of politics, economics, sociology etc. is creating much striving for control but as we fail - truthfully it's creating much fear. Not just a future fear for infants who have yet to grow into any part of it but a declaration that says we're all afraid – right now !!!

Rowan – and us – could be tempted to let fear rule as we live in the space of the unknown, unable, unwilling and the uncontrollable world in which we live.

But we could also be reminded of the great faith of the centurion that this is also a n awesome sacred time to live in this world. As we grow into people that are humbled by God's grace as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and in the power of Jesus Christ.

And that is our prayer and our baptismal promise to Rowan. That we would be the hands and feet of Jesus to him and to all those around us. Praying in faith, living in faith that the person and the power of Jesus Christ would become real for all we encounter.

That they – and Rowan as well – would hear this good news and in great faith call out to Jesus as their Lord as their Saviour. To lead us confidently through this world into the one yet to come.

That is our prayer – that is our plea. That is also God's promise, God's presence and God's power. For us, in us and through us. Amen and Amen