

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

we learn in different ways. Some of us learn by reading, others by hearing and still others by hands on experience. There have been countless books written on the topic of faith. These have been helpful for many. For many other followers of Jesus, though, something more is needed. We have that “more” in today’s text. The text contains great examples of what comprises an incomparable faith.

It is common knowledge that faith is more than agreement in certain religious doctrines. Faith is not a noun, but rather it is a verb. In other words, we do not “have” the faith, instead we “live” the faith.

In the story of the Centurion and the healing of his servant we see the demonstration of a faith focused on others. The Centurion was not approaching Jesus on his own behalf, but rather the Centurion’s “highly valued” slave.

Most of the time people approach Jesus to heal themselves. There are some notable exceptions, though. In the second chapter of Mark the author records that Jesus heals a paralytic. The man had been carried to Jesus by four of his friends. In the seventh chapter of Mark the author writes about a foreign woman who boldly approached Jesus on behalf of her daughter.

It is not wrong for us to bring our needs before the Lord. God invites us to do this. We are also encouraged, though, to pray for the needs of others. One of the ways that we can bear one another’s burdens is through prayer.

We pray for others during our prayer of the church. I pray for family, friends and my congregations each morning and evening – I encourage you to do so as well! It’s such a blessing to have others praying for you. There are times when, in the middle of our struggles or sicknesses we, ourselves, can’t pray and we need the prayers of others.

The Centurion displays a notable sense of humility when he approaches Jesus. He doesn’t feel worthy to approach Jesus and ask Jesus to heal his servant. So, the Centurion requests that Jewish officials speak to Jesus and make the request. When Jesus comes near the Centurion’s home, the Centurion tells Jesus that he is not worthy to have Jesus enter his home. (It would have meant that Jesus would have been defiled according to Jewish law.) Instead, the Centurion encourages Jesus to just say the word.

We often attempt to approach Jesus from a position of strength. We remind Jesus why we are worthy of God answering our prayers. If we feel that our position is a little weak, we may resort to bargaining with God, saying that we will do something if God answers our prayers.

When we read the story of the Centurion’s servant, we understand that Jesus did not respond to the Centurion’s request because the Centurion was worthy of answered prayer. We also assume that Jesus did not come to the Centurion’s house because of who the Centurion was and how he could have forced Jesus do come if he wanted to do so. No, we realize that Jesus responded to the Centurion because Jesus saw a person in need—the slave.

The Centurion’s unique military perspective allowed him to see Jesus in a different light than the Jews. At this time in Jesus’ ministry, the people who came to him thought of him as a man with a special gift. Jesus had the gift of healing and the ability to cast out demons. The people did not see Jesus as a possible Messiah. The disciples didn’t realize that Jesus was the Messiah until near the end of Jesus’ ministry.

The Centurion had heard what Jesus had done. Jesus had healed numerous people and cast out demons. Jesus obviously was a man of great authority. Jesus acted like a general in the Roman army. A general did not need to be present for his orders to be carried out. The Centurion understood that Jesus did not need to enter his house and touch his servant for the servant to be healed. Jesus merely needed to say the word.

Great faith sees who God is through the pale of struggle, sickness, tribulation and grief. We see God’s steadfast love. We know that God is a God of great power. We rest in the assurance that God is present with us and will see us through. Such faith gives us the peace that passes understanding and the strength we need to endure.

We will never be perfect in our faith. We can know some of the key elements of faith, though. Empowered by the Holy Spirit we can incorporate these into our lives and live, love and serve as people of faith.

Amen