**The Centurion – Awakening Faith**

How do people come to faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God: and by that faith have life in his name?

**We know that faith is a gift of God given to people by the Holy Spirit as they hear the word of God preached or read it.** The writer of the gospel according to John knew this and says as much when he says, he has recorded his account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection so that people may believe that Jesus is the “Christ, the Son of God: and by believing have life in his name” (John 20:32).

John also records a meeting with a member of the Jewish ruling council called Nicodemus at night with Jesus. Nicodemus is looking for the truth about Jesus. Being a Pharisee, he would have been very well-versed in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus told him that he had to be **born again of water and the Spirit**. Despite having spent much of his life studying God’s Word, Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was telling him. Without the Holy Spirit’s help, it can be hard to understand let alone believe.

Jesus also told Nicodemus that the Spirit blows where the Spirit wills, **therefore only the Spirit knows whose heart will have the spark of faith planted and fanned into flame by the Spirit.** That is why it is important to give all people to opportunity to **hear God’s word and to meet in that word the Word made flesh, Jesus the Son of God.**

Sometimes those who appear ready end up not coming to faith. Ten lepers are healed. Their lives are changed forever, but only one returns praising God and throwing himself at Jesus’ feet. Most of the religious leaders in Jesus’ day are waiting for Christ to come, yet never come to faith in Jesus and instead seek his execution and death.

On the other hand, a **Roman centurion** who was probably a pagan idol worshipper has enough faith to believe that Jesus can heal his sick servant merely by sending a message to Jesus (Luke: 7:1-10).

There is also a **very fine line between belief and unbelief**. Thankfully Jesus responds to anyone who comes to him for help, even if they are on the very edge of faith, like the father of the epileptic boy who cries out, **“I do believe, help my unbelief!”** (Mark 9:24, NRSV). For many people, faith begins **when all other possibilities of help have disappeared, and God is their only hope. It is then that the Holy Spirit cries out with our spirit, “Lord have pity on me, help me.”**

The other thing about faith in Christ is **that it is dynamic**. In Peter, we see that faith is not a static thing, but rather like any relationship **trust waxes and wanes**. Peter’s faith **reaches for the sky** when he sees Jesus transfigured on the mountain. He steps out of a boat full of faith and confidence and very quickly sinks. He steps out in firm faith cutting off the ear of the high priest’s servant and not long afterwards he denies Jesus in fear.

**Few people have an unshakable faith in** Jesus. For most of us our faith waxes and wanes. Sometimes we are on the **mountaintop and then other times we are sinking and drowning in unbelief. T**hat is why **we continually need to return to God’s Word, receive the body and blood of Jesus and wait for the Spirit to breathe new life into our faith.**

At the foot of the cross, after Jesus has died, we find some other unexpected people who make a confession of faith. **These are the soldiers and the centurion in charge.** A few hours earlier **they had been mocking Jesus**, stripping him, placing a scarlet robe on him and a crown of thorns. Putting a staff in his right hand, kneeling down before him mocking him as they said, **“Hail, king of the Jews!”** (Matt. 27:29, NIV).

As Jesus hung on the cross these soldiers cast lots for his clothes.

When we come across people who like these soldiers are far from faith in Christ, who openly mock Jesus and maybe even use his name as a swear word, we may be **tempted to think they have no hope of receiving faith**. There may even be people like this in our family or among our friends and associates. We **may be tempted to avoid any conversation on religion and give up on ever telling them about God.**

The soldiers at the foot of the cross and the officer in charge are the most unlikely people to come to faith in Christ. Yet as they experience the circumstances of Jesus’ death, **and he finally takes his last breath, they all confess together, “Surely he was the Son of God!”** (Matt 27:54, NIV). Luke also tells us the centurion, the captain of the guard confesses that Jesus is innocent as he says, “**Surely this was a righteous man.”** (Luke 23:47, NIV).

Soon a member of the ruling council and secret disciple of Jesus, **Joseph of Arimathea** gets Pilate’s permission to take the body of Jesus. Another council member **brings myrrh and aloes** to embalm Jesus. Don’t be surprised! We have met him before! It is Nicodemus! Did the Holy Spirit blow his way? Did he receive faith in Christ, the Son of God: and by believing have life in his name?

**Amen.**

**Pastor Rolf Lungwitz**