

St. Luke 7:1-10

Dear Friends in Christ,

Article II of The Augsburg Confession of the Evangelical Lutheran Church states, in part:

It is also taught among us that since the fall of Adam all men who are born according to the course of nature are conceived and born in sin. That is, all men are full of evil lust and inclinations from their mothers' wombs and are unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God...

That's what we believe: "...unable by nature to have true fear of God and true faith in God." That is an unacceptable statement for those who think God loves them because they've accomplished something deserving. But - more importantly - the Scriptures teach: "...you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world...(we) were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." (Eph. 2:1-3) We were spiritually **dead children of wrath**. As was recently stated, that which is dead can't make itself alive, much less appease the wrath of God.

This morning . . .

THE CONFESSION OF A ROMAN CENTURION

I. Worthy?

After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue. (vss. 1-5)

First, it appears that the centurion was a convert to Judaism. The centurion sends the elders of the Jews to Jesus, instead of a Roman soldier. Jesus is informed "he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue." The centurion's hearing about Jesus and belief that Jesus could heal the servant could indicate that he was living in expectation of the coming Messiah.

But the words that should first and foremost catch our attention are these words of the elders of the Jews: "He is worthy to have you do this for him...", based on his love for the nation and the building of the Synagogue. *Worthy*. We can focus on a couple of issues here, but this is the one I want to consider: *Worthy*.

Almost 20 years ago, ***The Religion and Society Report*** featured an article entitled, "Boorish, Offensive or Merely Depraved"? The article was dealing with how we understand the deterioration of our nation through a look at issues such as children going on killing rampages. The article stated:

"According to the Book of Genesis, the human race is fallen, by which is meant that it is grievously flawed and strongly inclined to evil. In general, history seems to bear out this melancholy analysis (and I would say history does not 'seem' to bear this out but consistently confirms it.)...

"All of the major Christian confessions acknowledge fallen man's depravity, but some stress it more than others... Today much of Christendom (I would say "most") glosses over the doctrine of human depravity, preferring to act as though it believed that down deep everyone is really good at heart." (Religion & Society Report, June 1998)

II. Or Unworthy?

Over the years we have made a multitude of references to the Parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The need for its repetition is patently obvious in light of human nature's persistent self-righteousness, no matter how much a person reads the Parable. Well, here it is:

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get." But the tax collector, standing far off would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Lk. 18:10-13)

One person says, "I'm a decent human and deserve God's love and I don't want to hear the negative about being sinful. I'm tired of it!" The other person says, "I'm a sinner and in trouble. God help me!" Look at what Jesus says about this: "I tell you, this man (the miserable, sinful tax collector) went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lk. 18:14) And let no one say, "I'm thankful I'm not like that Pharisee!"

What Jesus says completely makes void the sentimental thinking that God surely wouldn't condemn to hell the philanthropic people who love and help others - the exciting celebrity - the nice people. For the world and most church people, Jesus is either a liar or doesn't mean what He says when He says, "I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins." (Jn. 8:24)

So, maybe your heart aches because a beloved family member or friend doesn't know or want to know the love of Christ, or responds negatively to any discussion about Jesus and His Church. And maybe you want to say, "Well, he/she is such a good person. I can't believe God would condemn the person to eternal darkness." Scripturally, it doesn't work that way. Never has. Never will.

And therein lies the truth and trouble of our day: An unwillingness to see ourselves as God sees us; to see ourselves as we truly are...consistently. And, with that, a reckless insistence that humans are deserving of only those things that make them happy. We would prosper better at the hands of Almighty God if we would remember how He sees us: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." (Prov. 14:12) "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23)

And, so, the centurion . . .

III. The Right Confession.

...when he (Jesus) was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." (vss. 6-8)

It's a simple and powerful confession: "I am not worthy." That's it. That's was the bottom line for this centurion, as it is for you - for me. One way or another, we confess it here every Sunday: "...I justly deserve your present and eternal punishment." We confess it every day. "I am not worthy." In fact, Jesus said, "So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty.'" (Lk. 17:10)

Human reasoning is muddled with self-righteousness and arrogance. The clarity of what human sin is and does stands in the Light of Christ: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I Jn. 1:9) The Scriptures are clear about this: "...the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (I Jn. 1:7b) Jesus was very, very clear about this. Again: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lk. 18:14b)

And, as far as this centurion's right confession is concerned, our text closes with this:

When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well. (vss. 9-10)

The Lord uses the centurion to teach all who listen. Christ came for - and comes for - those who were and are **fully aware of their unworthiness**.

Please listen: Christ came for and comes for those whose sin and guilt cries out and tears at their stability - for those who are weary of life, fearful of tomorrow and looking for someone who can help them - for those who dread the grave and what's beyond - for those who can barely stand the changes of life and the loss of loved ones. He comes to bring God's love, forgiveness of every sin, eternal life - to embrace and hold the undeserving. And that He does daily - as often as we wish - through His Word, in our Baptisms, and in His Supper.

You see, the confession of the Centurion is our confession!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott

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St. Luke 7:1-10:

“The Confession of a Roman Centurion”

- I. Worthy?*
- II. Or Unworthy?*
- III. The Right Confession.*

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Avenue
Decatur, Illinois 62526*