

## FAITH

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton  
at Tomorata and Hakaru, Sunday 29 May 2016

Luke 7:1-10

[ MW16-18]

An elderly lady was well-known for her faith and for her boldness in talking about it. She would stand on her front porch and shout "PRAISE THE LORD!" Next door to her lived an atheist who would get so angry at her proclamations he would shout, "There ain't no Lord!!" Hard times set in on the elderly lady, and she prayed for God to send her some assistance. She stood on her porch and shouted "PRAISE THE LORD. GOD I NEED FOOD!! I AM HAVING A HARD TIME. PLEASE LORD, SEND ME SOME GROCERIES!!" The next morning the lady went out on her porch and noted a large bag of groceries and shouted, "PRAISE THE LORD." The neighbor jumped from behind a bush and said, "Aha! I told you there was no Lord. I bought those groceries, God didn't." The lady started jumping up and down and clapping her hands and said, "PRAISE THE LORD. He not only sent me groceries, but He made the devil pay for them. PRAISE THE LORD!!!"

This morning we are considering "faith"

- so can you quickly tell me three things about faith (or more!)  
["prize" for each answer]

Specifically we are considering "faith" as it is revealed to us in this morning's Gospel

- Luke chapter seven, verses one to ten  
who's read or heard this particular incident before?
- you know I have read it many, many times  
I confess that I can't remember hearing a sermon on it  
but that's okay ... because I can't remember writing one on it either!

Think back to Luke's recording of this incident

- an army officer with a seriously ill servant  
a request for Jesus to come and heal this servant
- followed by a message for Jesus not to trouble himself  
by actually going to the officer's home
- then Jesus healing the servant "at a distance"  
and a commendation of amazing faith

When I was preparing to write this sermon I read Luke 7:1-10

- as I have done many times before  
but this time something struck me  
actually leapt out at me ... something I had never noticed before
- and I will tell you about it in a minute, promise

But first, does anything strike you from these verses?

- or to put it another way: what stands out for you  
in this incident of Jesus healing an army officer's servant  
as recorded by Luke???
- [space for thinking and answering]

You know what struck me???

- in this incident as Luke records it  
the army officer never even speaks to Jesus  
never lays eyes on him even!!!
- all we know for certain is that the officer had heard about Jesus  
in all probability he had not seen Jesus "in the flesh"  
and what's more, he never would!

I always imagined this army officer and Jesus meeting in the street

- and having a friendly yet meaningful conversation, the way Jesus so often does  
but Luke says it didn't happen
- Matthew's record of the same incident has this friendly meaningful conversation  
just like I pictured it
- and both Matthew and Luke have Jesus say:  
"in all of Israel I have never found anyone with this much faith!"
- so the aspect of "faith" is obviously important  
but while Matthew seems to be saying something about the people  
who perhaps should demonstrate such faith but do not (the Jews)
- Luke seems to be saying something significant about "faith" in general  
faith for all people

Some things to note ...

- the army officer is a Roman  
a pagan, a gentile, a definite outsider  
an enemy, a member of the occupying army
- yet this enemy outsider has obviously responded to something in  
Jewish life and faith  
for he has built them a synagogue ... this in itself is remarkable
- further the officer shows great care for his servant  
actually "servant" is a kind word, he is a slave  
and most slave masters did not care whether their slaves lived or died
- so here we have an outsider, someone who should be an enemy  
showing amazing care and outstanding faith  
so much so that he himself does not even need to talk to Jesus  
much less see him face to face

As I was thinking about this a few thoughts sprang quickly to mind:

- faith is found not only inside the walls of the church  
and not only among followers of Jesus
- faith may be seen in unlikely places  
and among unexpected people
- but perhaps the most important  
the way Luke tells this story is a great encouragement for us  
because we are in the same position as that army officer ...
- we have heard about Jesus but not seen him 'face to face'  
and whatever that army officer did, well we can do it too  
and expect Jesus to act

While we reflect on this, let me share with you something about faith from one of my favourite writers, Philip Gulley, a Quaker Pastor in the United States who uses ordinary everyday incidents to convey some great truths. This is a chapter from his book *Hometown Tales*:

I live in the city. If you live in a small town, you probably already feel sorry for me. Pastoring a church in the city was not my idea; it was God's. God gets blamed for a lot of things. Some people blame God when they get sick. Others blame God if their marriages fail. I blame God for the theft of our car CD player. If God had kept us at a country church, this would not have happened.

The CD player was stolen while the car sat in our driveway. I called our insurance man to report the theft. He was sympathetic and promised to send me the necessary paperwork to file a claim. Three days later, Charles the mailman delivered a six-page questionnaire. The first question asked where the car was when the theft occurred. I wrote that it was in our driveway. Why was the vehicle there, the next question asked. Because our garage is full of junk. I answered. Insurance companies are awfully nosy these days.

Another question asked for the police case number. I didn't have one of those. Bill hadn't given me one. Bill is our neighborhood policeman and lives down the street from us. He works the night shift, which is the only shift our neighborhood police department works. During the daylight hours, we fend for ourselves.

Bill sleeps until supper, so I waited until he was up and about before walking down to his house to give him the news. He was embarrassed. The year before, someone else had a CD player stolen from his car. Our neighborhood was enduring a crime wave, and Bill was taking it personally.

Bill asked if I had locked the car. Of course not, I told him. If I had locked the car, the thief would have broken out a window. Better to let him at it, I say. Bill agreed. Then he suggested I put lightbulbs in my security lights. I had unscrewed the lightbulbs because they attract bats. I was afraid the bats would get tangled in my hair and drive me mad. Bill suggested I buy a hat. These are the hidden costs of crime we never think about.

Later that night, I was going through the house, turning off lights and drawing the blinds. I looked out the window. A man was walking down our lane. He stopped at our bushes and crouched there a long time. I continued to watch him. When my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I could see it was Bill. He was on a stakeout. It was cold and rainy. I wanted to take him coffee, but I had the feeling he didn't want anyone to know he was there.

I talked with him the next day. He mentioned he had been down to our house the night before. No luck, he said, but he promised to keep a close eye on things. He said sometimes a thief will give folks a week or two to replace a stolen CD player, then come back and steal the new one. So Bill has been keeping watch. I see him while I'm drawing the blinds, crouched in the bushes, his hat pulled down to keep out the bats.

If he manages to get by Bill, the thief will be in for a surprise. We didn't buy a new CD player. Instead, we took the insurance money and bought my wife a dulcimer. After the kids are asleep, Joan sits in the front room and plays. Every half hour, Bill drives down the lane and looks things over.

A long while back, the psalmist wrote about a God who neither slumbers nor sleeps, about a God who stands watch all night long, who keeps us from evil and evil from us. A celestial Bill.

I lie in bed and think of God and Bill keeping faithful watch as echoes of dulcimer hang in the air. Fear can keep us up all night long, but faith makes one fine pillow.

We have a God who is faithful, a God who cares

- whether we actually see God or not, or see God working  
it remains one hundred percent true

Further, our God responds to faith

- now we don't have to do anything for God to be faithful to us  
that is the nature of God, as Jesus reveals it to us
- however it does seem that our faith allows or enables  
God to act in particular ways

So, having listened to all that ...

- can you tell me three more things about faith  
different to the things we said at the beginning  
[space for answers ...]

And some "homework", something to do this coming week:

- reflect on what "faith" is in your life
- and, how might you be encouraged by the faith of the Roman army officer?

So to conclude ...

During the terrible days of the Blitz, a father, holding his small son by the hand, ran from a building that had been struck by a bomb. In the front yard was a shell hole. Seeking shelter as quickly as possible, the father jumped into the hole and held up his arms for his son to follow. Terrified, yet hearing his father's voice telling him to jump, the boy replied, "I can't see you!" The father, looking up against the sky tinted red by the burning buildings, called to the silhouette of his son, "But I can see you. Jump!" The boy jumped, because he trusted his father. The Christian faith enables us to face life or meet death, not because we can see, but with the certainty that we are seen; not that we know all the answers, but that we are known.

Faith ...

- not because we can see  
but because we know with absolute certainty we are seen
- not because we know all the answers  
but because we are known