

**Luke 7:1-10**                      ***Beyond our Expectations***©  
**Rev. Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates**                      **June 2, 2013**

I love this story of Jesus healing the centurion's servant. There is quite a bit here to consider, but first I just want to picture Jesus. What is your image of how he looks; or how he reacts to something?

We see love when we hear of him with the children; we see laughter and joy when we think of Jesus at the wedding; we see kindness and compassion when he is with a blind man or a leper; we see mercy when he is with a woman caught in adultery and about to be stoned to death. We see firm determination when he is up against those in power whose unfair treatment goes against everything Jesus is about. We see grief and pain when he praying in the garden and about to be arrested.

But look at Jesus' face now! Luke tells us when Jesus heard about the centurion's faith, Jesus was amazed. Picture the face of the Son of God amazed! A look of surprise - A mouth dropped open and eyes wide with amazement.

I love to picture our Lord in his humanness – with full human expressions, like we all have.

But what was unusual about the faith of this centurion that would cause Jesus' great amazement?

Well ... just about everything, really!

Here is a man of some authority— a Roman soldier who has proven him self to be able to be in charge of a unit of 100 men. He would have a considerable amount of power over those who were in the occupied territories under their control.

He certainly had the power to punish those who were not cooperating with the powers that be. He may have been an officer serving Herod or Pontius Pilate. In general, the Roman occupiers were seen as oppressors and were not looked upon as friends to the Jewish people.

So, the fact that this centurion would even ask the Jews in the synagogue who he could turn to for help – that was amazing in itself!

The fact that he was a friend, someone who had helped them build the synagogue, whom the Jewish elders spoke highly of – that was amazing!

And then, for a Roman soldier to send for this Jewish prophet to help him – that too, was amazing!

And even the fact that he had such compassion for his servant that he would go out of his way and do something so unusual as to ask Jesus to come – amazing!

And isn't it amazing that the thing Jesus was most amazed by was the faith – the trust this centurion had – faith that one word from Jesus would heal? Amazing!

It's amazing that Jesus didn't consider whether the man was worthy or not (even though the Jews, whom he had power over claimed he was, yet he said he wasn't). Jesus didn't even check to see if he was a believer – whether he believed in God the Father or if he believed in some pagan god. He didn't ask if he accepted Jesus as his Lord and personal Savior. He didn't even tell him to repent of his sins.

He just was amazed that this man, whom he knew little about – a Roman centurion – had more faith than any one of his own people who were supposed to know all about God and the promised Messiah – even those in his own hometown who had tried to throw him off a cliff! Amazing!

And aren't most of us determined that seeing is believing? Don't we want to see with our own eyes before we can fully believe something is true? Not this centurion!

How many of you have experienced – truly had a moving experience in your life where you knew without a doubt that Jesus had entered your heart and life? You know, there are some traditions who claim if you don't have that personal experience with Christ, you won't be saved.

One of my favorite writers and preachers says he likes the saying – “If and when you get to heaven, don't stare!” There just might be some amazement – some jaws dropping and eyes popping when people look around in heaven and see that there are many whom they did not expect, who are there.

This man in our story had not seen Jesus. He had not had a personal encounter with Jesus, but he had *heard* about Jesus from others. He heard stories about Jesus' compassion and love, forgiveness and healing. He *heard* about Jesus and he believed, and even Jesus is amazed at his faith!

And doesn't this give us a lot of hope? Don't we all know and love lots and lots of family and friends who really have no connection with Church, who don't show much interest in organized religion – who are very good, compassionate, caring citizens but whom we aren't sure where they stand in their faith. And for many, we are pretty sure they have not had that up-close, personal encounter with the risen Lord.

Yet, we see here that trust and faith that amazed even Jesus – a trust that was there simply because he heard about Jesus.

We all look back to the good old days when the church was overflowing with people – with children and young parents as well as grandparents. And, by the way things look in the mainline church where we have empty pews and fewer young faces, we wonder sometimes if the world is losing faith.

And, yes, we do want the church to thrive and continue on because it is a blessed place to learn and grow and worship and fellowship together. Yet, our greatest concern should be about the faith of others even more than the pews being filled.

I think this story gives us hope that Jesus recognizes the faith of many who might be beyond our expectation – and – with the way he was amazed, it might even be beyond his expectations as well.

And what about you? Have you had that earthshaking conversion experience that some tell about? Have you had that personal encounter with the risen Lord? Have you, at times, felt that you are not worthy of Jesus coming to you, to your house, to your heart?

But, here is the great hope and amazing truth that goes beyond our expectations – Jesus knows your faith and trust. Jesus knows you and loves you! Believing happens even by just hearing about Christ Jesus. Simple faith – simple trust in the one you have read about and heard about – the one you have come to know through stories, through others – makes you a child of God, a trustworthy follower of Jesus.

Amazing grace is what it is! A jaw dropping, eye popping amazing gift of faith that goes way beyond our expectations and promises that we belong.

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