

JUST SAY THE WORD

A SERMON FOR COMMUNION SUNDAY

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

MARIANNA, FLORIDA

TED W. LAND, INTERIM PASTOR

LUKE 7:1-10

Just say the word...we use that phrase all the time, or we hear it used?

Here, that is exactly what the centurion is saying to Jesus: "Just say the word, and my slave, whom I value highly, will be healed."

And Jesus was amazed. You know, there are only two times in all the gospels when the word that is used here is used to describe the reaction that Jesus had. One, the first, is at the beginning of His ministry, when He tried to minister to the people of His home town of Nazareth. He could do nothing there, and the Bible tells us that "He was amazed at their lack of faith."

Here, Jesus is amazed at the faith of this one man.

This centurion was indeed an amazing man. As a Roman officer, he was in command of a unit of one hundred men. He would be the equivalent of a company commander in a modern army. He would not have been a General, probably not even a Colonel, maybe not a major, but certainly a Captain. He was used to giving orders. And used to having those orders obeyed.

He was a slave owner. Now that did not make him a bad man. It may have meant that he was a rich man, able to purchase slaves. Or he may have taken his slave as a prisoner of war, or as the spoils of war. Either way, he valued this slave highly. Now the way that Luke phrases that statement could mean one of two things. It could mean that he thought the slave was worth a lot of money. Or it could mean that the slave was important to him, maybe even dear to him. For some reason, the latter interpretation seems the better of the two.

If he was not a convert, a proselyte Jew, he was certainly sympathetic to the Jews. He had built their synagogue for them. Now that probably also indicates that he was a wealthy man, or at least worldly wise enough to put together the materials and labor force to erect a place where these people from Capernaum could come together for their weekly prayer and study of the scriptures.

He had status and influence with the Jewish community, for it was the elders, the leaders of the synagogue who came to Jesus asking that He go to the house of the centurion and heal the slave.

The centurion had faith. He believed that Jesus could heal his slave. But he also had humility. Modesty. He sent friends to say to Jesus, "Lord, don't trouble yourself to come to my house; for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof." He may have been concerned that it would compromise Jesus' status with the Jews, if He entered the house of a Gentile, of a Roman, even to perform an act of mercy. And so he says instead, "Just say the word, and my slave will be healed."

What simple yet powerful words. Just say the word...

Have you ever been sitting in an automobile dealership, negotiating a deal for a new car? And the salesman says, "Just say the word, and it's yours."

Looking at a new home, and the real estate sales lady says, “Just say the word, and you can move in...”

Just say the word, and all your dreams can come true.

Have you ever had enough faith to pray saying, “Lord, just say the word...”?

Most of the time, we ask God for a sign, for a visible or tangible reminder of the divine presence in our lives. But to have enough faith to trust in the Lord so completely, that we could say, “Just say the word, Lord, and everything will be all right.”

On my good days, on my best days, I have that kind of faith. But those good days, those best days, are few and far between.

My problem is that I don’t have enough faith, enough trust, to wait on the Lord. I want to get busy, get in there, get working, and do it myself. When what I really should do is have faith, and trust in Jesus.

It is the days when I trust in Jesus, when I have total, complete faith in Jesus, that are the good days, the best days.

It is like Louisa Stead wrote in the old hymn lyric:

‘Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take Him at His word,  
Just to rest upon His promise, just to know, “Thus saith the Lord.”

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!  
How I’ve proved Him o’er and o’er.  
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus,  
O for grace to trust Him more.

It is said that Louisa Stead wrote the words to that great old hymn after she had watched her husband drown while he was attempting to rescue a young boy in Long Island Sound. To have such faith to know that in such a great tragedy, such a great loss, she could still trust in Jesus.

May our prayer be hers:

I’m so glad I learned to trust Thee,  
Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend,  
And I know that Thou art with me,  
Wilt be with me to the end.

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust You,  
How I’ve loved You o’er and o’er.  
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus,  
O for grace to trust You more.

Amen and amen.

