

“Make Things Happen, Let Go”

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Providence United Methodist Church

2nd Sunday After Pentecost

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After Jesus finished presenting all his words among the people, he entered Capernaum. A centurion had a servant who was very important to him, but the servant was ill and about to die. When the centurion *heard* about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to Jesus to ask him to *come and heal* his servant. When they came to Jesus, they earnestly pleaded with Jesus. “He deserves to have you do this for him,” they said. “He loves our people and he built our synagogue for us.”

Jesus went with them. He had almost reached the house when the centurion sent friends to say to Jesus, I’m also a man appointed under authority, with soldiers under me. I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and the servant does it.”

When Jesus heard these words, he was impressed with the centurion. He turned to the crowd following him and said, “I tell you, even in Israel I haven’t found faith like this.” When the centurion’s friends returned to his house, they found the servant restored to health. This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Let’s pray. Lord of hosts who defends our cause, saves and shields us. Bless this word and cause it to take root in our hearts as we yield and give way to your instruction. With your Spirit in this place, make this word alive and active to become part of who we are as Children of God who trust their Heavenly Father. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Peace be with you! When Memorial Day comes around I'm reminded of my dad's brother who died in WWII at 20 years of age. I never met him, but I wait expectantly to finally see his face. Many of us here have loved ones we remember and some we never met, but we honor all those who have given their lives for our freedom. We regret the loss for soldiers who suffer from PTSD and other life threatening health ailments.

Thousands and thousands of men and women have died and suffered the loss of a limb and other tragedies that have affected their lives. Most recently the conflicts of Iraq and Afghanistan. Soldiers are awesome people and deserve our respect. Many wield great power and authority, and many answer their call.

The text for today talks about one such man. A Roman centurion by the name of Cornelius. Centurions were part of the backdrop in Judea and Galilee during the first century. Centurions show up more than once in the gospels, and you'll find they're positive in their response to Jesus.

Centurions controlled 100 men—teaching them to take instruction and act on it to obey. Cornelius the centurion looked through the lens of someone who knew about power and authority and understood it. He *recognized* that in Jesus, but he knew it was a different kind of power. Cornelius used a physical sword and shield in battle and defended Rome, but his power was *limited*. Jesus' power was *unlimited*. Jesus healed the sick, cleansed lepers, set free the oppressed from mental illnesses, offered forgiveness, and spread the Good News throughout the world. Jesus' power was his love for his Father's creation.

Cornelius had a difficult problem he was unable to solve. His servant was sick and on his deathbed. I'm sure he felt helpless. He knew he wasn't a healer, but he'd heard about Jesus and believed that Jesus could heal him. So he sent some Jewish elders to find to Jesus. The elders begged him and to Jesus, "He deserves to

have you do this for him,” they said. “He loves our people and he built our synagogue for us.” Cornelius had a strong influence with the Jewish community.

Jesus went with the elders immediately, but some friends of Cornelius approached them when they got near the soldier’s house. They also carried a message from the centurion for Jesus. They said, “Lord, don’t be bothered. I don’t deserve to have you come under my roof. In fact, I didn’t even consider myself worthy to come to you. Just say the word and my servant will be healed.”

Jesus was impressed and amazed with the message from Cornelius. Jesus turned to the crowd and said, “I tell you, even in Israel I haven’t found faith like this.” No doubt some in the crowd might see Cornelius or any soldier for that matter and pass judgment.

His uniform identified him as someone sketchy for he was one who meted out discipline. And Cornelius himself was an oppressor of the Jewish people as a soldier of Rome. Most would see him as dangerous and frightening just because he was a soldier. But let’s not judge Cornelius on one element of who he was, let’s remember the good he did in building the Jews a synagogue.

When the centurion’s friends returned to Cornelius’ house, they found his servant healed. Most of the time in the Bible we see people express faith in Jesus after he’s done something for them. This man had great faith and said just say the word and my servant will be healed. The centurion’s faith trusted before the miracle was performed believing Jesus could heal from a distance.

Jesus crossed social barriers in this story. So did Cornelius, but let’s take a look at how we might use this story in our lives for where God has been pointing us lately in the Scriptures. Cornelius had great power and authority, but he knew the love he had for his servant wasn’t sufficient to heal. He needed Jesus.

Anytime a loved one dies in our family we go through a deep dark place in our lives. Cornelius was going through that dark place. Something had come along

that was more than just a road bump—more than something his own power might solve. The text said he loved the Jewish people. People you love and trust and have a relationship with you go to them for advice.

The Jewish elders became Cornelius' emissaries. He had some other friends too that were there to offer assistance. They all approached Jesus for Cornelius. They became messengers of what Jesus could do, and God used them to bless a man with excellent faith—faith that was more than Jesus had ever seen in Israel!

We all go through dark places in our lives. We take counsel with friends we trust in the midst of our unspeakable pain and suffering. Darkness was so present at this moment for Cornelius, but God provided hope through his friends that knew about Jesus. Their advice was solid and reputable.

So, if we just step out into the darkness, knowing that God leads us. If we just step over our fear and trust, and believe that “God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. And God even sees me in the dark! At night I'm immersed in the light!” It's a fact friends: darkness isn't dark to Christ, and night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same!

Cornelius made things happen in his life. He let go. He relinquished control. He realized his limitations and put his trust and future in the hands of the one who holds our future. Let's be comfortable with God's plan as it unfolds and leave the timing to him without understanding the circumstances. Let's trust God and let God handle the provision—for that's what he's promised to do.

Let's pray. God of light and everlasting life, through your Son Christ Jesus you are the light of the world. Work within our hearts today to trust you with the kind of faith that Cornelius had. God use us as your emissaries to take the Good News into all the world. Help us to be noble vessels shaped by your hands that keep peace by obedience to you. Amen.