

**Sermon Preached By Canon Jim Holbeck At The Healing Service At St Andrew's
Cathedral, Sydney On Wed 24th August 2005.
Reading: Luke 7:1-10. Title: "Amazing Faith"**

Sometimes we are amazed at people. Amazed that the most unlikely people do or say the things they do. Jesus was twice amazed. Once at the unbelief in his own hometown of Nazareth. Mk 6:5 *And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6 And he was amazed at their unbelief.* The other time was **here in this story in Luke 7:1-10.** Jesus marvelled at the faith of a man who was most unlikely to have such faith.

What can you and I learn from this man about the nature of faith that brings blessing?

1. POSITIVE ATTITUDES BRING BLESSING. The Centurion

i. Knowing about needy people. *2 Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death*

This military man in charge of about 100 soldiers was unusual. He had a servant as many people did. But among the Gentiles, the non-Jews, slaves or servants had no rights or privileges. When they wore out, they could be discarded like old tools. They had served their purpose, and were of no more value. But this centurion was aware that the servant was not only sick but about to die.

ii. Caring about needy people. *2 Now a centurion had a servant ... who was highly valued by him.*

Even though the servant was extremely ill the Centurion cared about him and valued him. Luke could have used many words to say that the Centurion valued him but he used a word that means "precious". Peter used it in his first epistle to describe Jesus as "*precious*" to God. *1 Pet 2:6 For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." 7 To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner,"*

As Jesus was obviously precious to His Father in heaven, and as the Jesus was precious to His disciples, to some extent this servant was precious to his master.

iii. Desiring that the needs of needy people be met. *3 When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.*

The Centurion could have acted differently. He could have thought that he had been kind to the servant and really owed him nothing. They both had both got good value out of each other. Now the man is about to die so it was time to move on. Perhaps get a younger fitter servant tomorrow after the funeral service.

But his attitude was quite different. He would miss this servant. He wanted him to live in spite of all the odds that were against that happening. He looked for someone to heal the man. He had heard what people were saying about Jesus healing people, so he felt he had to get Jesus to come and heal his valued servant.

I suppose that's why this Healing Service exists. We try to know and face up to human needs and not run away from them. We try to care for those who need help. We want the needs of needy people met so we want to pray for them that God may bring them blessing and healing.

iv. An openness to God. That was seen in:-

His love for the people of God. *"He is worthy to have you do this for him, 5 for he loves our nation.*

He stood out in his time. Unfortunately not many people then or since have had a love for the Jewish nation. But God did choose them as His people through whom He wanted to bless the nations of the world.

This man stood against the anti-Jewish feeling of the time.

His love for the God of the people of God. *and he is the one who built us our synagogue."*

He didn't have to build a synagogue. That certainly wasn't on his job description as a Centurion. It was surprising that he had, but this was a surprising man. He was concerned that the people of God should be able to learn from their scriptures in the synagogue. But there was also a concern that the God of Israel be honoured in this way. And also an openness to Jesus that was surprising when many hearts were hardening towards Him.

2. POSITIVE FAITH IN JESUS' POWER TO HEAL. v 6

i. His exalting of Jesus and humbling of himself. *6 And Jesus went with them. When he 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.*

The Jewish elders were saying about the Centurion *He is worthy to have you do this for him.* He was saying of himself *I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.*

Their comparison was of him in relationship to other people around him.

His comparison was of himself with someone like Jesus. If Jesus was God's instrument in healing then he felt unworthy to ask Him favours.

It may have been he began to realise that He had asked a holy man of God to go out of his way to help, him. But as he reflected on what he had done he realised something. Jesus didn't have to come into the house for healing to take place.

We see now another dimension to his positive faith.

ii. His belief in the authority of Jesus to heal by a word.

7 Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed.

This is really quite amazing. A Gentile, a non-Jew believing that all Jesus had to do was to say a word of healing and healing would take place from a distance.

Why would he believe such a thing? Because of his own experience of the power of words coming from someone with authority. He as a military man could tell soldiers to come and go and they did. He could tell servants to do this and they would do it. He knew that words with authority accomplish great things.

So he believed that Jesus' spoken word as a man under authority as God' servant could heal.

3. JESUS' ATTITUDE TO THE CENTURION. v 9.

Surprise at the faith of a Gentile. "Such faith" *9 When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."*

Jesus was amazed. A Roman gentile had shown such incredible faith in believing that Jesus could and would heal a lowly slave. Not only that, but that He could heal by the power of His word even from a distance.

There were many by this time who had faith in Jesus' willingness and ability to heal. But this was the first time he had encountered someone who believed Jesus' word could heal from a distance.

Even Jesus was astounded. *"I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."*

4. THE HEALING. v 10

10 And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

We might imagine the surprise of the Jewish elders and the Centurion's friends as they arrived back at the house to find the servant well and whole.

There would come another time in Jesus' ministry when He would hear the cry for help from another Gentile, a woman, and heal from a distance. **Mark 7:26** *Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.27 He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."28 But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."29 Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go--the demon has left your daughter." 30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.*

Jesus could heal by the power of His word from a distance.

THE CHALLENGE FOR US TODAY

There are the positive attitudes we see in the Centurion we can emulate. Attitudes such as knowing about human need; caring enough to be interested; and wanting to see those needs met.

All with an openness to God in loving Him with all our heart and mind and soul and strength and in loving our neighbours as ourselves.

To realise Jesus can heal for He is the same yesterday, today and for ever.

A true story but with different names. A small evening healing service. A woman named Jo comes forward for prayer. *“What would you like the Lord to do for you? The answer. Would you pray for my friend Barbara? She’s bedridden with cancer at home and her condition is getting rapidly worse.* So hands are laid on Jo kneeling before us as we pray for Barbara “out there” at home sick in bed.

The next morning Jo rings Barbara and is amazed to have Barbara answer the phone. Jo in her surprise says *How come you were able to answer the phone?* knowing Barbara did not have the strength to do that before.

Barbara told her what happened. She said *About 8 pm last night I suddenly began to feel really well. I had a great sleep without pain and when I woke up this morning I felt so well that I got out of bed, got dressed and cooked my husband’s breakfast for the first time in weeks.* 8pm was almost exactly the time we were praying over Jo in the Cathedral and asking for healing for Barbara at home. Barbara enjoyed good health for many, many years after that with a couple of long strenuous overseas trips thrown in that she was able to enjoy with a new strength and purpose for living.

God can and does do things in answer to believing prayer. What might He do if we had the same positive attitudes and the same positive faith shown in such an unlikely person as that Centurion.

What might He do if we really trusted Him to hear our prayers and answer them?