

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota
 June 2, 2013

Luke 7:1-10
 1 Kings 8
 Galatians 1:1-12
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, I brought along a little lunch for us to eat during the Kid's Message today. Why do we eat anyway? What does food do for us? Suppose that this is going to be your last meal ever. What would happen to you? If there was no more food, what would there be to answer the hunger pangs coming from your stomach? If you couldn't eat anymore, you'd grow weaker and weaker until finally you would die.

When you come home from school or daycare at night, what's about the first thing that you ask your mom or dad? "**What's for supper?**" "**When do we eat?**" Why don't you ask, "**Can I eat tonight?**" How do you know for sure that your mom or dad is going to let you eat anyway? Don't you have to be "**good enough**" to eat? No? I guess that your parents love you and will always feed you no matter what, right?

Today we are going to be having the **Lord's Supper, Holy Communion**. What about when people eat at God's Table? What does Holy Communion do for people? It gives God's forgiveness of our sins and the promise of life in God's family forever. It shows God's great love for people. It gives us strength for living good lives. Are there any other ways of receiving God's love? Yes, we can also receive God's love through **Baptism** and by hearing **God's Word** in the Bible, Vacation Bible School and in sermons.

What if this was the last time anyone could eat at the Lord's Table? What if this was the last time that we could come to church and hear God's Good News? What if someone took away all of our Bibles? What would happen if we never again heard how much God loves us, cares for us and wants us to trust God? I think that we would get weaker and weaker, more and more lonesome and afraid. I think that we would get sadder and more selfish.

Would God ever turn people away from God's Table? Would God ever tell anyone that they couldn't come to God's church or read God's Bible? Would God ever tell anyone that they weren't good enough to be loved, forgiven and made new by God? God sets God's Table with food, invites us to come together for worship and then gives us loving Good News.

Thanks be to God for Baptism, for Communion, for crackers and cheese for life and love. God wants us all, wants everyone to eat and live with God always. Thanks be to God! Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Strange that anyone would care about a slave in those days. But this powerful man did and his slave was gravely ill. Then the **owner heard about Jesus**. Look out! **Faith has come to call**. God is at work!

But, Jesus blew it. This guy was the wrong kind of person. He wasn't a Jew at all. As a matter of fact, he was a Roman army officer working for the hated occupying army. Jesus should have steered clear of him.

Oh really? It's a funny thing then, that in our lesson from **1 Kings**, Solomon, king of Israel in its glory days, is talking to God about how **even the foreigners will come to worship God** when they hear about him. God specifically called the people of "**Israel**" for that purpose – to tell the story of God – so that **everyone** might come and worship God. But, those poor Israelites kept forgetting that they were supposed to be a "**light to the nations**," to call other people to a faith/trusting relationship with God. Instead they just focused on themselves, their own faith and needs, and eventually their glorious temple and kingdom crumbled into the dust.

The same message comes to us from the **Apostle Paul** in his letter to the early Christians in **Galatia**. **God's Good News**, Jesus' love, is for everybody, **everybody**! It's not just for good Jews, not just for people who keep all the commandments. Paul argues, if anybody says anything different about God's love, then let that person be **accursed**! They don't come any worse than that. It's not a good idea to stand between God's love and some person who needs it.

Now, here goes Jesus again! He was constantly involved with **outsiders**. And all through his ministry, the "**good religious people**" challenged him for it. You don't suppose that we're supposed to have anything to do with people who are **different**, **looked down upon**, **excluded**, do you? Jesus doesn't expect that of us does he?

Let's not worry over it for now. The centurion, this enemy Roman army officer, didn't want to cause any trouble for Jesus and his reputation. So he

sent a messenger telling Jesus that Jesus didn't have to come to the centurion's house, "**But say the word, and let my servant be healed.**" Can you believe it? This guy was no Jew. He was no follower of Jesus. He just **HEARD** about Jesus and respected his authority. "**You don't have to come here Jesus. I don't have to see you Jesus. Just say so and it will happen.**" This must be a made-up story. Nobody could be that gullible!

At least they couldn't be that gullible by themselves. **But, then, faith has come to call.** And faith does strange things with people. Faith not only draws people into a **relationship with God**, but it also makes them "**whole**." That's what the Greek word for "**salvation**" means – "**wholeness**," brought home to God where we have really always belonged. Our text doesn't even tell us that Jesus said anything about the servant, yet they came home and found him well... That same kind of life-giving faith is at work in you and I right now.

"**Faith?**" "**Who's faith?**" Do you see the surprise? Who got healed? It was the slave. Did the slave have any faith in Jesus? It doesn't say that. Do you mean to say that God can heal somebody, turn somebody's life around, without them even believing in Jesus? YES! This story is a scandal, but it shows ever so clearly, the **wonderful grace and love of God** which comes even to those with **little or no faith of their own.**

I don't think even the centurion's faith is due a great deal of credit. He didn't know Jesus from the man in the moon. He just "**heard**" and **believed.** **Maybe God did that too?** Maybe that's how God works? Through story-telling, hearing and believing, God goes about the business of **planting faith in hearts** and then **claiming people** like you and me for **life and work in the kingdom.** Has God claimed you for God's kingdom? Is God somehow moving to renew life within you today?

Maybe God speaks to us through a funeral sermon. Maybe God touches us through a caring meal delivered to our door. Maybe God plants the seeds of faith through the waters of Baptism and years later they are warmed by someone's loving care and then spring forth into new life.

Maybe this is what's going to happen to you, or to your spouse, or to your friend who hasn't heard yet, who doesn't believe yet? Somebody had to tell the centurion, and then the centurion interceded for the slave, and then

the slave was made well. And the **slave probably didn't even know what was going on**. Neither do we, most of the time.

But God does. **God knows what's going on**. God knows the tiniest details of what's going on in your life and mine. God is more than ready to move to bring about the best good for us and for those we love. Maybe, like the centurion, we should **ask God for guidance, help or hope**. And then, take God at his Word. **That enemy foreigner did. Anyone can. Right now would be a good time**. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayer for God's life-giving presence...