

Luke 7:1-10 - *Service of Healing*
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our gospel lesson today is obviously a story about a healing—the title sometimes given to this story is something like, “Jesus heals the centurion’s servant.” But to call it just that really limits this story and our experiencing God’s grace in Jesus through this story.

There is so much more going on than just a healing of a sick servant. That is wonderful enough in itself, though! This slave was ill and close to death. And Jesus healed him. The messengers sent by the slave’s owner talked to Jesus, requesting that he heal this slave and they returned to the house and found him in good health. That story is miraculous enough in and of itself! Jesus shows compassion for that slave and his master; he has pity on this centurion and heals the slave whom he valued so highly. Jesus is so powerful that he heals this slave who was so ill that he was close to death—he heals him without so much as touching him, seeing him or even being near him. But there is even more good news of God’s grace for us in Jesus in this story. We need to look a little deeper into the story.

This centurion was not a Jew. According to the Jews, the Israelites, there were two kinds of people. There were the Israelites or Jewish people who were God’s chosen people and who were set apart from everyone else by their religious laws and practices, and there were those who were not Israelites. The Jewish people, or Israelites, were a people whose whole identity was defined by God’s promises to be faithful to them. They were decedents of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The promises God had made to these their ancestors were the promises that they knew were for them. God had promised to always be their God and that he would one day deliver them from all that separated them from God. God promised that he would send a Messiah, a savior.

So they waited for God’s promise to be fulfilled. Sometimes they waited faithfully. Sometimes they turned away from God and disobeyed him. But always they understood themselves to be separate from everyone else. And they believed that God’s promises were only for them. The Israelites were hopeful that Jesus was the promised savior. They were hoping for and expecting a different kind of savior than Jesus is, however. They were hoping for and looking for an earthly savior who would defeat the foreigners who ruled them and who would reestablish their kingdom so they would be a great Jewish nation again. They were hopeful that Jesus was this savior. He certainly was powerful and had God’s presence with him. The Jewish people witnessed many miracles and healings and heard his many wonderful teachings and hoped that Jesus was the one who God had promised to them.

The centurion in our gospel story was not a Jew. He likely knew nothing about God’s promises of faithfulness and deliverance—he certainly didn’t think they were for him. He had heard about Jesus, however, and recognized the power and authority that Jesus possessed. So, he asked some Jewish elders, with whom he apparently had a good and respectful relationship, to go and ask Jesus to heal his slave whom we’re told he highly valued. Are you beginning to see the healing here that we needed to understand more of the story to see?

Jesus reaches across the earthly boundaries that separate people and nations. By now it was known that he showed compassion to not only his own people, but also to others who were not Jewish or the centurion wouldn’t have bothered or maybe even dared to ask for his help. Generations earlier, when God had made his promises to Abraham, the father of the Israelite nation, one of the promises he made

was that through Abraham he would bless all nations. God was promising that he would use his chosen people to bring about salvation to his whole world. The Israelites were God's chosen people not to set them apart from everyone, but because through them God brings his grace to everyone—to his whole world. In Jesus, that promise is fulfilled. Jesus is the blessing, the salvation that God promises to the world.

Remember, the Israelites were waiting for an earthly savior; a military and political hero to rule their nation. They hoped that Jesus might be the one because of the power and authority he possessed. They had no idea that the salvation God brings in Jesus is not just earthly salvation—being saved from oppression in this world—but is salvation from sin and death and all that separate us from God's love for us and presence with us. The Israelites did not understand how much bigger the blessings of Jesus are—Jesus is the healing for all people and nations and all of creation. Jesus is the healing that is victorious over all sin and death; Jesus is the healing that is victorious over all that wishes to harm us or to separate us from God's love for us. Jesus is God's love and healing that comes to us.

So we see a little glimpse of this in our gospel story. The centurion receives compassion and healing through Jesus even though by people's standards he has no business even asking for it. But Jesus isn't limited by what we think is right. Jesus isn't interested in our limited ideas of who can receive his mercy and he isn't interested in our limited ideas of what is healing. Jesus brings more healing than we can even begin to imagine. He reaches across the boundaries we keep that divide us and his grace is for all people. He heals the centurion's slave. He treats the centurion as though he was one of the insiders, the chosen ones. He gives a little glimpse of what God's mercy is for us and points to the fact that God's healing is bigger than we can imagine.

In our Old Testament lesson we are given a little glimpse as to what that healing that God promises is like. God will come and save us from all that would harm us. The eyes of the blind will be opened. The lame will leap for joy. The deaf will hear. The speechless will sing for joy. The desert will be a garden. All of creation will reflect God's goodness. Sorrow and sighing will be no more. We will know everlasting joy. We will be filled with joy and gladness. People will no longer be hurt or suffer or be divided. We will know God's joy and gladness. This is the healing that Jesus brings to all of creation, including you and me.

In our texts for today, we get a little glimpse of this healing that is bigger than we can imagine. And today in our worship, we are invited to ask God for healing in our lives and in the lives of those whom we love. Though it is perfectly fine to ask for healing for specific health issues and ailments, it is also good to ask for healing in other areas as well. And it is good for us to not limit our ideas of what God's healing looks like and to know that his grace and mercy and healing is more than we can imagine. Sometimes in our broken world healing can only ultimately come as we are brought home to God's eternal care. But we know that in Jesus that promise of healing is for us. Jesus loves us and forgives us. He promises to be with us in this world and to one day take us home to himself. Jesus surrounds us with his healing presence.

And as we live knowing this healing presence of Jesus in our lives, we are invited to share in bringing this healing love and mercy to others. We are called to reach beyond boundaries and our own comfort zones and love others with the love that God has for them in Jesus. We are given love to share with those who are hurting and suffering and need our care. God sends us out to be the presence of Jesus' mercy and healing for others.

Thanks be to God. Amen.