

Confession Sermon Series  
 "An Attitude of Confession"  
 Pastor Larry Lineberger  
 Hope Lutheran Church

When Pastor Puls asked me to preach on this text, I experienced some ambivalence, some mixed feelings. On the one hand I was pleased because this fascinating story of a Roman centurion, who with great faith entrusted the care of his valued, seriously ill servant to Jesus is a wonderful, rich text, filled with meaning and application for our Christian journey. This is not always the case.

All scripture is inspired by God, to be sure, but it is not all equally inspiring. Sometimes it is really difficult to wrestle a sermon out of a given text. Here, there is so much.

Consider for a moment how this story **encourages us to give witness to our faith**. We don't know who it was or when it was, but someone had told this centurion about Jesus and his healing power. This information certainly didn't come as a communique from Rome. Someone had said, **"Jesus can help."** We live in a time when words are cheap, but this little word, **"Jesus can help"** is a word of life, hope and power for anyone whose life is falling apart. I've been a pastor long enough to know that there is no one for whom life is just a bowl of cherries. We all encounter moments of doubt, grief and peril.

We shouldn't listen to this text without asking ourselves how often we might have opportunity to share that simple word, **Jesus can help**, with a friend in need, or a neighbor whose life is falling apart.

Then when you look at this story in its social, historical context, another lesson leaps from the page. **This Roman centurion is an outsider**, a Gentile. When this same story is told in Luke's Gospel (7:1 ff) there is a little detail added. The people tell Jesus that this centurion was a really good man who had financed the building of their synagogue, who was obviously not prejudice against Jews, a real rarity in the ancient world, in our world also. It seems clear that they tell him this for fear that Jesus would write this man off as an outsider. But not to worry, Jesus knows nothing of race, color, social position. This centurion presents himself humbly, with a need, and on that basis he is an insider, one of the family.

We dare never forget this, Jesus is for people who may think of themselves as outsiders, people who have sinned so grievously they think they dare never show their faces in a church, the impoverished, the homeless, the illegal alien. Jesus is for outsiders.

Then we could talk about the **great faith that this centurion possesses**. Jesus offers to go to the man's house to care for this servant, but he says, **"no need." Just say the word, and my servant will be healed**. Jesus is really impressed. Nowhere in Israel has he seen such faith.

As you can see, there is a lot of spiritual meat on this bone... a lot to think about. But **here is my ambivalence. Our chosen theme for this Lenten season is confession**. All our sermons are to focus on this critical aspect of our faith, the need to confess, to confront our pride, our self-centeredness, our eagerness to blame others for the problems we experience, like Adam, *"it was the woman...she made me eat...or Eve, it was the serpent, we find ourselves*

*hiding in the garden, covering ourselves because we feel ashamed, but then decide this must be somebody else's fault. It's got to be somebody else's fault.* We find it so difficult to take responsibility for our failures. We find it so difficult to confess. I am at fault. No matter about all the extenuating circumstances. Ultimately I am at fault.

**At first glance there seems to be nothing in this text about confession.** How am I going to preach about confession? We know nothing about the personal life of this centurion, nothing of his character flaws or misdeeds. No doubt he is a sinner but we know nothing about the particulars. He says nothing about his sins.

Many sermons about confession accent this point, and rightly so. We seem eager to avoid the particulars. We Lutherans make confession every Sunday. *I confess that I am a sinner, in thought word and deed.* We have no problem saying this. Now name three of your sins... time, place and persons sinned against. Details, particulars. Now we stumble...Duh... Hadn't really thought about it that way.

This is one the **advantages of the Roman Catholic confessional booth...** Some of you may come from a Catholic background, and all of us, I think, have seen enough movies which reveal what happens in a confessional booth to know that no priest would ever let you get away with simply saying "*I am a poor miserable sinner.*" No, he will require you to be specific. He wants you to name the particulars. And there **is nothing in this text about particulars.** Nothing explicit about confession.

What this **centurion brings to Jesus is what I have chosen to call an attitude of confession, a frame of mind, a way of thinking that is so necessary in our relationship with God, so critical in our faith walk...and so fundamental to proper confession.** He came to Jesus humbly asking for help. He was deeply aware that He was at the end of his tether, he was out of his depth, he did not have what was necessary to overcome the challenge he was facing. No doubt he had already exhausted whatever health resources might have available to heal his servant. This was his court of last resort. And he was deeply, humbly aware of this. He is so humble before Jesus that he doesn't even feel that he deserves to have Jesus come to his house. Think about what kind of a statement this is coming from a Roman centurion. This is likely the most powerful man in this community. He represented all the power of Rome and on top of that he had garnered the respect of the people because he had not despised them, he had helped them... He was top dog. And he comes to this itinerant preacher humbly asking for help. **He had an attitude of confession.**

**Now translate all that into our own state of mind when we come to God in our worship and make confession.** Do we come really asking for help? Longing for healing? Deeply aware that we are at the end of our tether, that we are out of our depth, that we have absolutely no capacity to change anything about our condition, that we have a terminal illness, destined for death and destruction... conscious of the fact that we may be respected in our community, persons of some accomplishment, but completely naked and defenseless before a righteous and holy God. Do we reflect on the fact that we don't deserve to have Jesus come to our house? Or His Spirit come into our hearts?

We don't deserve to have this holy house of worship, to belong to this family of God, to experience the love and support and the prayers of this congregation in our time of need. **Do**

**we have an attitude of confession?** Before we mouth the words confessing our sin, before we get into the particulars, do we have the frame of mind to make our confession more than hollow words repeated by rote? **Do we have an attitude of confession?**

This Roman centurion teaches us so much about ourselves and our relationship with God, and he teaches and **illuminates what it means to have faith, to have confidence in God's healing power.** He has a huge problem and he **just turns it over to Jesus... no questions, no conditions, just total confidence that Jesus will bring healing and health.**

How privileged we are. We can **look to this cross with total confidence, trusting, believing that in our Lord's life, death and resurrection we are forgiven.** Though our sins be like scarlet, yet we are whiter than snow. As terrible as our disease is, we are no longer terminal. In fact, we can anticipate eternal life. Thanks be to God. Amen.