

Sermon 1st of Trinity 2016

Gal 1: 1-12

Luke 7: 1-10

How can we think that some people are unworthy of the love of God after reading the Gospel reading today?

How do we, often judge whether people are worthy?

Perhaps they are like us.

Perhaps they go to church.

Perhaps they do good deeds

Perhaps they helped build this church, like the centurion who built the synagogue.

What about people that do none of these things, are they unworthy. What about those whom others have no good word to say about them? Are they unworthy?

And who has authority to judge?

God?

Then why is it that we often think that the job of deciding who is worthy of God's love is down to us, or the Church? Some Churches for instance, make people jump through so many hoops before they will baptise them.

We have opinions! Of course we do! But our opinions are not always right.

In the story the centurion was no ordinary man. A centurion was the equivalent of a regimental sergeant major; and the centurions were the backbone of the Roman army, whenever they are spoken of in the New Testament they are spoken of well.

This centurion had a completely unusual attitude to his slave. He loved this slave and would go to any trouble to save him. This is interesting as in Roman law a slave was defined as a living tool; he had no rights; a master could ill-treat him and even kill him if he chose.

A roman writer, writing on estate management recommends that the farmer examine his implements every year and to throw out those which are old and

broken, and to do the same with his slaves. Normally when a slave was past his work he was thrown out to die.

We can see through this reading that the centurion was a deeply religious man. A person needs to be more than superficially interested before he will go to the length of building a synagogue. It is true that the Romans encouraged religion from the cynical motive that it kept people in order. They regarded it as the opiate of the people. Augustus recommended the building of synagogues for that very reason. But this centurion was a respectful, deep thinking man. And in a time when anti-Semitism was writhe, this man seemed to have a close bond with the Jews.

He was also a humble man. He knew quite well that a strict Jew was forbidden by law to enter the house of a gentile; just as he was forbidden to allow a gentile into his home or indeed have any communication with him. He would not even come to Jesus himself he sent his Jewish friends to approach him. This man who was accustomed to command had an amazing humility in the presence of true greatness.

Lastly he was a man of great faith, as Jesus said such a faith not found in the whole of Israel.

There are people in this world who do not run with the heard. When others are throwing stones they are mending the windows. When others are gossiping they are quiet, when others are hating they are loving, when others are blaspheming they are quietly praising God. When others are worldly and striving for monetary success others are spiritual and giving to those in need.

It is difficult to be different to have different opinions and a different way of life.

And as Christians this is what we do, we may not realise it but we live differently, we live knowing that there is something bigger than ourselves bigger than our own importance and the centurion knew this he knew he was not worthy to have Jesus come under his roof. He knew that the authority of Jesus was bigger than any god that the pagans worshipped. He was not a Jew but he knew of Jesus, he had heard probably the stories about him, the miraculous healings. He was not a follower of Christ or part of the Jewish religion of which Jesus was, but he knew of the greatness of this amazing man.

Testimonies are always more powerful when they come from none-believers, why would a none-believer give testament to what is not true, there is no

merit in it. When we hear of such faith from someone who had nothing to gain from telling the story we can believe it is true.

This gospel reading is one of the most powerful testaments to Jesus as Lord, because it comes from someone from outside the Jewish faith. This centurion went against the tide of the time in many ways.

Firstly, by loving his slave so much that he would go to any lengths to save him, when indeed most Romans would have dispensed of him like an old tool

Secondly, by acknowledging that Jesus is Lord and worthy of praise.

And if we want any more examples of people going against the tide or not running with the herd then we need look no further than Jesus himself. Jesus was radical so perhaps when we think that we know who is worthy and who is not then think of the cliché 'what would Jesus do or in this case think', because I believe it may be those that we deem unworthy that God deems worthy, remember we do not know the relationship people have personally with God... And so I don't think heaven will be full of just white middle class church going heterosexuals.

People need not seek the approval of their peers but God.

As St Paul says

"Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ."

Amen.