

Easter Matters
Luke 7:1-10
April 4, 2021

Christians celebrate many important seasons and dates throughout the year. The Christian calendar highlights the following seasons and dates: Advent season, Christmas, Epiphany, Ash Wednesday, Lent Season, Palm Sunday, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, All Saints Sunday, Thanksgiving, and Christ the King Sunday. These are some of the common seasons and dates we highlight. Among them, probably the most important day for Christians is Easter.

The Easter story is very familiar to most of us. According to Luke's version, early in the morning of Easter a few women went to Jesus' tomb to anoint his body with spices. When they came to the tomb, they discovered that the huge rock that covered the entrance to the tomb had been rolled away. Wondering what had happened, they looked inside and stepped in. No one was there and Jesus' body was gone. The tomb was empty. They had no idea what happened. In the midst of their confusion, two angels appeared and said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen. Remember? In Galilee, he told you that the son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day, rise."

"Yes, he did say that. We remember. But we didn't believe it, because the dead doesn't come back to life by itself. But it really happened!" They left the tomb right away and went to the disciples and told them but the disciples did not, perhaps could not, believe it.¹

As difficult as it may be for people to believe the resurrection of Jesus, it is the foundation of our faith. It demonstrates the power of God. Jesus Christ is the Lord of life. Because of this, nothing has ever been the same since, nor will it ever be. As the post-resurrection followers of Christ, we need to hold onto the power of God, the Lord of life.

You might wonder why I chose that passage for Easter Sunday that has nothing to do with Easter. It is a story of a gentile believer who not only believed in the power of God but also believed and trusted that Jesus is the Lord of life. It is amazing that he had such faith even before anyone had seen the resurrection of Jesus.

¹ Luke 24:1-12.

Our scripture lesson may teach us what kind of faith we need to have as people who believe in Christ's resurrection. This Bible story tells about how people understand and determine worthiness of an individual.

How do you judge a person's worthiness?

Worthiness of an individual is often measured by outward signs. We are what we do. What we have achieved is often the measuring stick to determine our value and worthiness. The elders of the Jews wanted Jesus to know that this particular Roman Centurion was worthy of his attention. Why? It was because of what he had done. They said, "He loves our nation, and he built us a synagogue."

Please notice that it was remarkable in those days that a Roman Centurion, a Gentile, would be friends with the Jews. A normal relationship between the Jews and the Gentiles in those days was one of contempt and hatred, not love and respect.

These Jews, however, felt good about the Centurion because of what he did for them. Their evaluation of him was based on how he lived and how he treated others. No doubt that is a good way of evaluating someone's character but is it the basis of determining one's worthiness of receiving God's grace and mercy? That was the basis of the Jewish elders' appeal to Jesus on behalf of the centurion.

If this becomes our basis for our worthiness to receive God's grace and mercy, then we are reducing our faith to a system of exchange. We don't barter with God, do we? We cannot say to the Lord, "We have done this and that; therefore, we are worthy of your blessings, mercies and graces," can we? Our relationship with God or our place in His Kingdom is not based on our actions and what we have achieved. It is all a matter of grace. Grace is not earned. None of us are worthy of God's grace. We cannot be good enough. We cannot do good enough. So, while there is a sense in which we are what we do, we are never to think that worthiness in God's sight is dependent upon what we do or what we achieve.

Then there is the Centurion's self-perception of his own worthiness. Other people considered him worthy because of his outward signs but the Centurion saw himself from the inside. He recognized who he really was in relation to one who exercised God's power.

We get a good picture of him in verse 6. It says, "The centurion sent friends to say to Jesus, 'Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you

come under my roof. Actually, I did not feel I was worthy to come to you. But only speak the word and let my servant be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘do this,’ and the slave does it.”

The Centurion was expressing an understanding of Jesus that was rare. It is amazing that he had such conviction even when he had never seen or experienced the power of God in Christ Jesus. This Centurion recognized that Jesus was the Lord of life.

He knew that Jesus had the power and the authority to do anything he wished to do. “Speak the word,” he said, “and my servant will be healed.”

And the Bible says, “Jesus was amazed.” Listen to verse 9: “When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.’”

This is a radical expression of faith. It is a profound expression of absolute trust. The centurion did not feel he was worthy of Jesus’ attention, but he trusted him. He knew Jesus was the Lord of life and death. That is the kind of faith we need to have.

What difference would that kind of faith make in our lives?

Are you or your loved one out of a job because of COVID or for whatever reason? Are you struggling to stay together in your marriage? Do you have a wayward child? Has your relationship with your child or with your parents gone wrong and has it been like that for a while? I know many of you and your loved ones are struggling with health issues. No matter what challenge you face, they are all extremely difficult and distressing issues and concerns. I am sure you all are doing all you can to try to stay strong. I want to encourage you to continue to remain bold. Vibrate with hope, because you believe in the one who has the power over life and death.

The Lord is not only the master and the author of life but he is also with you in all of your life and throughout your life. No challenge in life is bigger than the Lord. Having that faith, having that trust makes all the difference as you face the challenge.

I know that the Lord does not heal everyone, not all prodigals come home, and not all relationships heal. But having the faith and trust in the Lord gives us strength to deal with all our challenges.

There is a woman named Mary living in Oklahoma. She was a wonderful, good, happy and positive woman. Then, something happened a few years ago that changed her life completely.

She and her husband with their three children were down at Lake Murray, in Oklahoma one weekend waterskiing. All her children were good skiers. Mary was driving the boat and pulling her seven-year-old son Scott on the skis behind. He was a good skier, but a big wave rolled by and he took a tumble in the lake. Mary turned around to pick him up. Well, Scott decided that he had enough and wanted to get out of the lake. But then it happened. As he was pulling himself on board in the back, Mary accidentally hit the throttle with her elbow in such a way that the boat went into reverse. Young Scott was knocked off and got caught in the propeller. And when they got him out of the water, he was chewed up so badly that he was already in critical condition. They rushed him to the hospital. But the doctors could not save him.

Can you imagine? Put yourself in Mary's shoes, and just imagine how she must have felt. Awful! Just awful! She had to be hospitalized for a couple of weeks because she simply could not function; and even after she was released from the hospital, she was still in a state of shock and dismay. She was lifeless. You could see that on her face and in her eyes.

A few months later, she went to visit her pastor. She was in such a pain that she could not continue with her life. Her pain and guilt were so severe that she had even thought of suicide. While she was with her pastor, at one point, she said, "I can't go on like this anymore. I don't deserve to live. I deserve to die. I just can't forgive myself."

And do you know what her pastor said? He said, "You're right. You're absolutely right. You cannot forgive yourself at all, and you will never be able to do so."

Well, Mary looked at him with the most puzzled expression on her face. She didn't expect that. She never expected her pastor would say something like that.

“What do you mean?” she said. “What do you mean that I cannot forgive myself? Never?”

And the pastor said, “That’s right, Mary, never. You will never be able to forgive yourself at all.” He paused for a moment and then said, “But, you can receive God’s forgiveness, and that, Mary, will set you free.”²

So, it doesn’t matter what the issue is. The answer is trust. Trust the risen Christ because only Christ can do for us what needs to be done. If we can move to that point of deep faith, and join the centurion in that affirmation, “Speak the word and it will be so,” then the mountains will be lowered; the valleys will be lifted up; we will receive the strength to cross all challenges. And we will make it no matter what we face. That is what Easter is all about. With that affirmation, Happy Easter to you!

² From Norman Neaves’ sermon, “You Cannot Forgive Yourself.”