

The Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 2, 2013
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Authority

Today's Gospel and Epistle readings are about Authority. Just hearing the word can cause a wide diversity of reactions, responses. We learn very quickly about parental authority. We grow to accept governmental authority. Authorities govern our lives – stop signs, red lights, speed limits. Most of us experience authority and the authorities that define our workplaces, our jobs. I am under the ecclesiastical authority of our Bishop and the Canons of the Episcopal Church. Christians proclaim the authority of Christ and we know this authority as love.

Love is the power, the authority that can guide and govern our lives. What do we love? Who do we love? How do we love? Is our love unconditional, without expectations, without demands, without our own needs? We know God is love. But how do we understand this love that is God?

In today's gospel story we find some answers to our questions about the authority of love. A Roman soldier, a centurion, in command of 100 Roman soldiers in the city of Capernaum, loved the native Jews. He built their synagogue, meaning he paid for the construction costs. Even more remarkable, this centurion cared so much for one of his slaves that he sent Jewish elders to appeal to Jesus to come and heal the slave.

And, even more amazing, this centurion proclaimed that he was not worthy to have Jesus come to his house. He knew the Jewish purity laws. He knew Jesus could not remain ritually clean if he entered a Gentile's home. The centurion sent his friends to Jesus and they told Jesus what the centurion hoped and believed, "*Lord, only speak the word, and let my servant be healed...*"

We have an ancient prayer in Holy Eucharist, Rite I, that reminds us of this gospel story. Normally, we say the prayer only in penitential seasons, or only if we use the full Rite I service. The prayer is called "The Prayer of Humble Access." We use it right after the Lord's Prayer, right before we come to receive Holy Communion.

"We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou are the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy..." (BCP, p. 337)

In this prayer of "humble access" we proclaim our faith, our love, our sense of God's power and authority, to fill our lives through the love of Christ's body and blood, through the Eucharistic feast we are about to share.

Paul knew this same power of love, this same authority. "*...the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin...I did not receive it from a human source...*"

There were those who doubted Paul's authority, just as there were those who doubted Jesus' authority. God's love is not controlled or subject to human interests. God's love gave Paul and Jesus the authority to preach, to teach, to heal.

We spend so much time and energy debating what God wants us to do, what we think God wants us to do. Live with the faith of the centurion. Trust in Jesus. Know the faith of Paul – his sense of radical forgiveness and transformation; his personal love of Jesus as Lord and savior. Love is the authority guiding Jesus and Paul. Love can guide our lives as well.

Our faith is personal; it's all about persons, people – the person of Jesus, the persons we relate to each and every day. How do we treat each other? What is the authority, the power we share? Is it love? Or is it selfishness, self-interest, self-centeredness? Can we say with the centurion, "*Lord, only speak the word...*"?

Last week I read a short article about seven ways we can all help the Church to grow. I see these seven ways in today's gospel and in Paul's letter to the Galatians. All of this is really about our relationships, person to person. It's Personal. As we come to the end of the school year, as we move now into our summer schedule, may we remember the centurion, may we remember St. Paul, and may these seven concepts help us here at Grace Church:

1. Lead with leaders
2. Prioritize your time
3. Never waste energy
4. Embrace change
5. Make hard decisions
6. Build healthy teams
7. Refuel, recharge, renew often

"Lord, only speak the word..."

1 Kings 8:22-23, 41-43
Galatians 1:1-12
Luke 7:1-10