

Sermon
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West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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Text: Luke 7:1-10

What is faith?

I saw a clip on *You Tube*, in which twins, who are still in their mother's womb, are talking to each other: "Hey brother," the 1 says, "do you believe in life after birth?" "Huh?" he asks. "You know, do you believe in mum?" "No," he replies, "I don't believe in those things. I mean, have you ever seen mum?! ..."

And although it is quite absurd to see twins talking to each other in the womb, I think it is a brilliant clip! Because it shows just how absolutely ignorant it is to not believe in God.

We are to God like those twins are to their mother.

They are not born yet, so they have only experienced a fraction of what it means to be alive. They are living in a safe bubble – surrounded by the amniotic fluid, fed and loved, without them realising any of these things. Their mum is carrying them around with

her all the time – they are a part of her, and they always will be. They are blissfully unaware of what is going on around them in the world, because their mum is protecting them.

And all of this is true, even though neither of them know or understand it, even though they have absolutely no evidence that their mum even exists. But the fact that they have never seen her doesn't mean that she isn't there.

Just like that, we have only experienced a fraction of what it's like to be alive – because our life here on earth is only one part of our existence.

We are also living in safe bubble – protected, loved, and fed by God. God made us, we are his children. We are just as much part of him than a baby is of its mum.

And nothing that happens to us can ever change that. So whether we acknowledge it or not, whether we experience it or not, whether we believe it or not – God is there.

We haven't seen him yet, but one day we will. And although we are like *babies* when it comes to understanding things that happen to us, if we allow ourselves, we will be able to feel God loving us, we will be able to feel God's presence in our lives. That's not something that can be explained to other people or that makes a lot of sense, and

although we can't proof scientifically that God is there – we *know* that he is.

And *that* is what faith is.

Another example of faith can be seen in our Scripture reading. A centurion – a well paid, well respected, high ranking Roman soldier – asked Jesus to heal his dying servant. Why? Because he believed that Jesus was able to do that.

There are a lot of things going on in this story:

- Why would the centurion want his *servant* healed? In those days slaves were not regarded highly, they were treated like possessions that could be bought or sold at the owner's preference. But obviously this servant was more important to the centurion than a mere possession – and that probably has something to do with the fact that Roman soldiers weren't allowed to get married at that time, which usually meant that their servants were like family to them.
- The centurion sent Jewish elders to Jesus. Why didn't he go himself? Probably because he wasn't a Jew. He knew Jesus would listen to Jews; he wasn't so sure if Jesus would listen to a *Roman* soldier – an enemy to the Jews, on many levels.
- But this Roman soldier wasn't like many of his fellow soldiers – he donated lots of money towards the building of a Jewish synagogue, and because of his attitude towards the Jews, they respected him and wanted Jesus to help him.

- The centurion was watching out to see if Jesus would come, and when he did, he sends friends out to tell Jesus that he didn't want to trouble him to come into his house. This meant 2 things: In the first place he was showing Jesus that he was a well respected man, hence the many friends he had – which was very important in that culture. And 2ndly he knew that if Jesus came into his house, it would mean that Jesus would become ritually unclean, because Jews weren't supposed to mix with gentiles.
- But to prove to Jesus that he believed that Jesus could heal his servant, he explained that he himself was a man of authority – and if he told someone to do something, they would. Just like that, if Jesus told his servant to get better, he would. He believed that.
- The centurion's attitude towards Jesus and his faith in Jesus, made Jesus want to heal his servant – so he did.

It was a long shot, really, for the centurion to think that Jesus would heal his servant. But Jesus surprised him.

Jesus was very impressed that somebody, who wasn't even a part of the people of God, understood him and his message so well, treated Jesus with such respect and believed that Jesus undoubtedly could do anything.

The person you would least expect it from – somebody from the other side, somebody who was rich and famous and influential, humbles

himself, and asks Jesus for help. This probably impressed Jesus too – because asking for help when you yourself were in a position of authority, was just something that wasn't done in those days – because you could lose some of your own honour by honouring someone else. This might even have brought the centurion into trouble with his own people, but he was only concerned with the wellbeing of his beloved servant.

And in the end, it was all worth it!

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So – what is faith? To believe in God...

To believe that he can heal your 'servant', even when all the odds are against you. In other words – to believe that God can change your circumstances, even when it feels impossible.

The story of the centurion shows us that God can do *anything*. But we also need to remember, that he doesn't *have* to do everything we ask him to.

And that, maybe, is one of the reasons why some people struggle to believe – because God doesn't always give us everything we want.

But that is because he is looking at our lives from the outside. We only live in the now, because that's all we can do. But God knows

more, and sometimes, what we want *now*, doesn't fit in with the rest of His plan with us.

And *that* is what faith is – to believe in God despite what is happening to us, despite what is going on around us. To know that He knows best, and to accept that. To be thankful when he answers our prayers, and to wait patiently when he doesn't. To be open to be surprised by him.

Imagine what life would have been like if we weren't protected by God's love – if we had no-one to turn to when we were sad or lonely or hurt or worried or unwell; if we had to take the full blow of things that hit us... But luckily we don't. Luckily we are safe in the bubble of God's love and care.

So let's believe that God knows best. That he is always there for us, even when it's difficult for us to see him.

Can you imagine the surprise on those twins' faces when they were eventually born and held tightly in their loving mother's arms? Let's live in such a way now, that when one day God opens his arms to us to welcome us to our final home, we won't be surprised at all.

Amen