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Pentecost 02 –June 19, 2022

“Just Speak the Word”

Read: Luke 7: 1 - 10/ Memorize: Luke 7: 6 c - 7

During the Revolutionary War, the story is told of a horseback rider approaching a group of soldiers attempting to unsuccessfully move a heavy piece of timber. A corporal was standing by, hands on hips, barking the order, “Heave! Heave!” As the men failed, he yelled louder.

The rider asked the corporal, “Why don’t you help them?” Straightening himself up to his full stature, the corporal snapped, “Because I am a corporal.” The rider dismounted, put his back to the work and helped the men accomplish it. He then climbed back upon his horse, looked the corporal in the eyes and said, “The next time your men need help, corporal, send for the commander-in-chief.” Authority typically changes people.

Jesus returned to Capernaum, only to discover that His reputation had preceded Him. More and more people, even the powerful ones, now knew about Him. We’re told by Luke that a centurion had a servant who was sick and near death. The startling thing is he cared about him. Slaves were considered human tools. When a tool was used up, you threw it away and got a new one.

He was different in another way. He was a God-fearer, a Gentile who was open to the Jewish faith. He enlists some elders from the synagogue to ask Jesus for help.

He commanded a legion, a group of 100 men. Like the corporal, the privilege of “command” came with the position. He makes that clear, “For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘go’ and he goes; and that one ‘come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘do this’ and he does it.”

Jesus is impressed that the elders tell him that the centurion is “worthy to be helped because he is a man who loves the nation.” He’s even been generous enough to build a synagogue. Jesus heads for his home.

As Jesus nears it, He is stopped by other friends of the centurion, telling Him that He does not have to enter the house. The centurion knows that if Jesus enters his house, He will be considered ritually unclean and other problems. He says he's unworthy, yet believes that Jesus can "say the word and my servant will be healed."

What's also incredible is that the Centurion calls Jesus "Lord." Remember he's used to being in charge. When you call somebody Lord, you're saying that they are in charge. Jesus responds with these beautiful words, "I have not witnessed such faith, even in all of Israel."

When they get back, the servant is healed. It almost like the healing of the servant is incidental to the faith expressed by the centurion. He's a man of authority, prostrating himself, before the supreme authority.

Words have power! WE all know that. Words have power to build up and to break down. We each have a ministry of words, even though we are not always faithful to speak them. They are words of reconciliation.

At times, we fail in that ministry. Tempers can flare, harsh words are spoken; relationships hurt. There is an awkward feeling that presses down upon the relationship. Suspended in your throat, dangling between passion and compassion, pride and reason are words waiting their time: "I'm sorry." Words that are sometimes impossible to say.

Words can remove fear! There's a person sitting anxiously in a hospital waiting room. A loved one, a friend is undergoing a life threatening operation. Running through their mind are a multitude of "what if's" and "if only's" that race through while you are waiting.

Finally, after what seems like forever, the doctor enters and says, "Everything went fine." "No complications and the patient will be up in no time." These words reveal the joy of what Jesus has done. They've removed the terrible weight of worry from tired shoulders, erased shadows which had crept in upon the soul and replaced the unspoken fears with unspoken joy. Words have power.

A pastor tells the story of growing up. He relates that everything seemed giant sized, especially the trees. They were tall, spreading trees that lined both sides of the street, forming a kind of leafy tunnel, like Dorset Drive.

The young boy had been trying to declare his independence. Finally, his parents gave him permission to attend the local theater without them. The theater was only four blocks away, but that was not the point. He would get to go on his own. He was overjoyed, until he left the theater. He was just four blocks from home, but now, he would have to walk them in the dark.

He relates that the night seemed very, very dark. Those thick, hovering trees obscured whatever light there might have been. Shadows flickered and danced in every direction. They seemed like long finger-nails, which lurked behind every tree and preyed upon children; Too frightened to walk, too afraid to run, his heart pounded against his shirt as if trying to break away and take its chances on its own.

Finally, he was down to just one lone block to go. He thought to himself that maybe he would make it home. Then fear took over. He was certain that, just as he got to the front yard, perhaps even the doorstep, they would come flying out and capture him. Then half way down the block he saw this gigantic, looming figure.

He was just about to inform the neighborhood of his predicament when a voice called out, "Shadows about to get you, boy?" It was his father's voice. Doxology and Hail Mary! Dad was coming up the street to meet him. His father's voice, only words, but I submit to you from personal experience, words that can annihilate fear.

Somewhere, sometime, there is a person who will need to hear a word of assurance or encouragement from you. I don't know them, but you will. You will also know the word they need to hear. God promises to provide it. Will you speak that word to them?

Rupert Brook, an English poet, was leaving Liverpool by ship in the early 1900's. All around, he saw crowds of people waving to loved ones. He had no friends to see him off and was suddenly overtaken by a sense of loneliness. He saw what looked like a street kid on the wharf. He left the ship and headed towards the boy.

"What is your name, boy?" he asked. "William," the surprised lad answered. "William, would you like to earn six pence?" Brooks asked. William was excited to do so. "All I want you to do, is to wave at me as the ship pulls away." The teller of the story relates that Brook's never forgot the figure of the little urchin, waving a dirty little handkerchief delivering him from loneliness.

We superficially wave to people, forgetting that what they would really appreciate is a sincere word. Loneliness is different than solitude. Solitude is intentional privacy. Loneliness is circumstantial detachment. In solitude we are involved with ourselves, perhaps with God. In loneliness we are detached. To the lonely, speaking a word of care can brighten their day in ways impossible for us to appreciate.

Words of healing, words of encouragement, certainly the healing ministry of Jesus was unique but we as Christians have been given another grace, the ability to speak words of fellowship and love that change other's conditions. The writer of Proverbs said it best in Proverbs 25: 11: "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver."

There is one other word that we can share. A man came out of his house on his way to church one Sunday morning. Across the yard, his neighbor was loading his golf clubs into a station wagon. The neighbor called out, "Henry, do you want to play golf with me today?" Henry, with an expression of self-righteous horror on his face, replied: "This is the Lord's Day and I always go to church. Certainly I would not play golf with you today."

After a moment of embarrassed silence the golfer said, "You know, Henry, I have often wondered about your church and I have always admired you. This is the seventh time I have invited you to play golf with me but you have never invited me to go to church with you."

Sometimes, a word of witness, like the other words we've mentioned, begs to be spoken. Think about that centurion one more time. See him coming on behalf of another, engaging in ministry, putting together a faith-filled, unrehearsed, combination of words that our Lord could not help but take notice. Christ performed the greater ministry, but the servant owes his healing to the centurion.

There is someone waiting to hear a word of reconciliation, fellowship, caring, healing or witness. Will you speak it? Perhaps we would do well to listen to the words of Psalm 19: 14: "May the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be pleasing to you, oh Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

Here's your question: What word will you speak to someone in need?