

‘By Whose Authority’
Rev. Dr. Ann C. Kemper
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based on Galatians 1:1-12 and Luke 7:1-10

At the opening gathering of the Board of Ordained Ministry meeting in March, a member of the Board gave an update about his wife. We had been praying for her for the last few years as she underwent treatment after treatment for cancer.

We braced ourselves for the worst. He gave nothing away as he updated us...until the very end when he said, ‘at the last meeting with the oncologist he reported she was cancer free.’...and then with a mighty bellowing voice he stands up, lifts his arms, and with tears in his eyes, he says, “Thank you Jesus!”

Through it all, this man trusted Jesus. He believed in Jesus as the one he followed; the healer who passed through the countryside of Galilee 2000 years ago preaching a new gospel...a man who taught us a new way to love, and be loved, by God...a man who was appointed under the authority of God...to bring hope to a hopeless situation.

A scientist or medical professional might have deduced his wife’s healing was the result of a combination of chemo therapy, radiation and pills that vanquished the cancer...but to this very happy man...there was only one explanation. ...it was Jesus, the healer!

This man is a self-proclaimed ‘servant of God’...a slave to Christ. As an itinerant pastor, when Jesus says ‘go,’ he goes, and ‘come’ he comes; ‘do this’ and he does it.

Was it his faith that healed his wife? Were his prayers any more fervent than others whose loved ones battle a disease? By his faith was she somehow deemed worthy of being healed over the millions of others who are still sick?

Those are the hard questions...and without faith we would be tempted to look elsewhere for answers rather than to look to Jesus.

We don’t know the answers to those hard questions. That is one of the great mysteries of faith.

I know that’s not a comforting answer to someone whose loved one is suffering or even dying. But to not understand that mystery, is not a reason to leave the faith...or look for alternate claims of ‘good news’ that gives false hope to the oppressed, suffering, sick and dying.

Jesus is still the wounded healer who passed through the ancient homeland of Galilee and passes through our hearts today.

Yes! It is true...Jesus still expects us to continue praying and lifting petitions on behalf of others. Jesus still commissions us to be the ones who bring comfort and encouragement to the sick and dying; it is Jesus who calls us to bring others into the

faith ...a faith that doesn't answer the hard questions with anymore than the comforting words, "Do not be afraid."

There is an important vagueness to faith that can only be trusted to be true...and to live IN fear is to NOT live by faith. Faith and fear are polar opposites.

We absolutely cannot live by fear and claim we live by faith.

Which is why we have to be so discerning when it comes to the current political climate that preaches fear at every turn. (But that's a sermon topic for another day.)

Today's gospel lesson is a story about Jesus admiring the faith of one who recognizes a greater authority...and bows in humility to it.

This gospel lesson today is about authority...it's about where we place our trust, our prayers, ...our *faith*. Or another way to look at it is to ask: upon whom do we place our hope?

Last week I read an article about being cautious when preaching sermons where Captain Obvious draws the conclusions. The article's point was that Captain Obvious only scratches the surface of scripture. The true revelation of scripture is in exploring the unsettling, discomfoting, yet sometimes deeply revealing aspects of the scripture readings as it applies to our daily lives.

So, lest we get too pre-occupied with the main point of the story Captain Obvious would identify as "Jesus is our authority upon whom we place our faith and trust." But that may be too obvious. Let's look a moment at the sick slave who lay dying; a beloved slave of the master.

It's easy to see that if one just has enough faith, or enough trust, or even enough hope in Jesus, then miracles will happen. ...because sometimes it does!

But what about the sick slave? With no indication of the slave's gender, I'm going to assume the slave was a woman.

Did she have faith?

She lay ill on her bed mat...near dying. Her master, worried about her...perhaps even prayed for her...she was beloved by him and his household.

The Roman centurion (about as far an outsider as you could get in those days) sends an urgent plea to a healer who had recently passed through their village.

Come, he pleads...and Jesus comes.

Throughout the ordeal of the sick slave were people who stood in the gap between life and death. Her master, Jewish authorities who advocated for the Roman centurion, her master's friends who vouched for the centurion's humility...all advocating on her behalf for her healing because of her master's willingness to submit to a greater authority.

What does faith have to do with authority? By whose authority are we here today on this beautiful, warm, late spring day?

Jesus!

The Roman centurion...a master himself...understood authority. But he also knew he could not save his beloved slave....but Jesus could.

You see, Jesus not only heals...Jesus saves!

Did the centurion have faith? Perhaps not in the same way we think of faith. But what the Roman centurion had was an understanding that to submit to an authority means to leave nothing behind. No doubt. No hesitation. No reluctance. No half-hearted prayers.

You see, healing and salvation is the same thing!

To be physically healed is to be saved from death.

To be spiritual healed is to experience salvation from the perils of the faithless.

Why did my colleague give thanks to Jesus that his wife was cancer free?

Because he believes in a faith that moves mountains. Not a faith that gets us what we want if we ask long enough...but a faith that submits to the reality of living with God in an intimate and trusting way.

That is salvation!

Faith that is grateful for physical healing and an affirmation of the spiritual healing that comes by faith.

That kind of faith in the saving grace of Jesus takes humility and a willingness to believe *and live* in Jesus.

A pastor from Bloomington, Indiana puts it this way: "Faith is openness to the possibility of living and dying in a different way."

My friend chose Jesus. My friend believes in Jesus. My friend has faith in Jesus.

Was the wife of this itinerant pastor healed by faith? We can only say 'yes' by faith...surrendering all to Christ and finding true peace and joy in the saving grace of Jesus.

To Jesus' credit, she lives.

PD Prewer wrote this creed called 'Believe It and Live It' ...it's printed in your bulletin, please read along with me.

BELIEVE IT AND LIVE IT: A Creed

By God, I believe!

Through Christ I believe!

In Spirit and Truth, I believe!

In spite of myself, I do believe

and seek to employ faith in the healing of a broken world.

In spite of many unanswered questions,

faith persists and propels me forwards.

In spite of dull-wittedness I can still pray:

"Just say the word, Lord, and healing will follow."

In spite of my self interest,
 God continues to carve a space in my soul for true loving.
In spite of enemies who taunt or friends who undermine,
 I find myself taking risks for God.
In spite of being drenched by the negativity of the mass media,
 I reach for the future in hope.
In spite of anxieties cultivated by politicians and by prophets of doom,
 I rest my being in a core of calm.

I spite of myself, I do believe
 and long for that faith which dares to move mountains.

By God, I believe!
By Christ I believe!
In Spirit and Truth, I believe!

Thank you Jesus!

Let us pray: