

When Jesus had finished saying all this in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. ³ The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵ because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." ⁶ So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ For I myself 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." ⁹ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, **"I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel."** ¹⁰ Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

In the name of Jesus our Savior, dear friends,

Things that are unlikely and are uncommon are often of great interest to people. There are people who are really interested in rare coins. Certain gemstones are valuable and desirable because they are uncommon. It is unlikely that a painting you or I might produce by putting paint to canvas would rival those of the Master Painters! Baseball, the sport of summer, is full of uncommon feats. Just watch a game on Sportscenter and you'll hear things like how uncommon it is for a blue-eyed, bald, 27 year-old third baseman whose mother is named Gertrude to swing and miss on the 3rd pitch each time he's up in a game that starts after noon on a Sunday. That's SO uncommon! Baseball loves that kind of stuff! And people tend to like what is not common and what is not likely.

Jesus liked it when he saw something truly uncommon. What was that thing? Great faith. In fact, we know of only two times that Jesus ever saw and remarked about the great faith of someone. One was the Canaanite woman whose daughter was demon possessed. The other we hear about today. As we look more closely at this man, perhaps we see a bit of ourselves...and something we aspire to. This morning we give some thought to **UNLIKELY AND UNCOMMON FAITH**

Capernaum was a city on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. A particular Roman centurion was stationed there. He was a Roman soldier who had charge over 100 men. When you hear that, you would imagine him to be a tough guy, authoritative, not a man to be trifled with. To the Jews, the Romans were the oppressive enemy and a commander like this was one to be feared. THIS centurion, however, was different...really different!

Everything about this man was unlikely. He loved the Jewish people. He had a synagogue built so that the LORD's people could worship. He was humble. He sought help from Jesus but didn't try to pull the *"Do you know who I am"* with Jesus in order to impress him or convince him to act on his behalf. He didn't even go to Jesus, but instead sent Jewish elders. It was the Jewish elders who spoke so highly of him and felt that he deserved the Savior's help. But the most unlikely thing about this man was

his faith in Jesus! You wouldn't think that a Roman soldier would put his faith in Jesus. To the Romans, Caesar was god. He was the one to be honored and worshiped. Later on the Romans would kill Christians for professing faith in Jesus and for not worshipping Caesar. But there he was—as UNLIKELY as it was—putting his trust in Jesus!

And his faith was of the UNCOMMON variety! He knew, for instance that if Jesus just spoke, what he was asking for would be done. Listen to this: **the centurion sent friends to say to (Jesus): “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself 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.”**

His problem was that his invaluable servant was at death's door. This servant was so important and the situation so serious that he sent to Jesus for help. He wasn't bragging when he spoke of his authority and his ability to tell people things and they would do it. He was explaining that his power made that possible. In the same way, he knew and trusted that Jesus' great power worked similarly. All Jesus had to do was say the word and his servant would be healed. He absolutely believed that.

And Jesus was amazed! He told those who were there that he had never seen such great faith! You would think that the person Jesus said that about would have been a little Jewish grandma who clung to the promises of the Messiah...or one of the Pharisees...or a synagogue leader...or at the very least, *some* Jewish person! But no! This UNCOMMON FAITH for anyone to have belonged to a Roman centurion! And we don't even know his name.

His name is not important, but his faith certainly is. If Jesus points to his as the greatest faith, perhaps we should consider it for a moment to see if we might learn from this centurion. So what was his faith like? His faith led him to love God's people (the Jews) and others (his servant) and to love God's house (he built a synagogue). He didn't make a show of his authority or abuse it. He showed humility and deference as he did not want to put Jesus out in any way. He simply believed that Jesus had the power to give life to a dying man—something only God could do. And he was right about that. Jesus is true God. He showed that in his preaching, his teaching and the miracles he performed. He had not only the power to give life to a dying man, but power to earn eternal life for every person!

You wonder if the centurion had all the dots connected when it came to the Old Testament promises pointing to Jesus as the one who would bring forgiveness and eternal life. But what we hear are the words of Jesus describing his faith—that his was the greatest faith Jesus had seen in all of Israel!

You and I have something in common with this centurion. Our faith is just as unlikely as his. Even if you aren't Italian and you're not a cop or a soldier, you are still similar to this Roman centurion when it comes to faith because your faith is unlikely too! In one respect, your faith was an impossibility because left to yourself, you could never believe; you would never believe. By nature every person is blind to God's ways and can't understand them. By nature every person is spiritually dead because of sin. By nature every person is an enemy of the holy God. The sinful nature in each of us corrupts us so completely that we don't even have the desire to look God's way, much less believe in him.

If you think that the centurion's faith is unlikely simply because he was a Roman, a soldier—that's only the half of it! Like us, he was also a sinner by nature. Left to themselves, no one wants to hear about this Jesus who never did anything wrong in God's eyes and died on a cross to pay for all the things we do that God calls sin. On their own, no one wants to hear anything about there being the only one way to heaven and that is through faith in Jesus Christ. And if you combine these facts with some of our backgrounds, we might say that it seemed VERY unlikely that we would have the faith we have today! God the Holy Spirit deserves the credit for the faith we have because without him working through God's Word and through baptism, not only was our faith in Jesus as our Savior UNLIKELY, it was impossible.

But you have faith now. If someone asks you, you say so. Maybe your faith is strong enough that you'll even tell people when they don't ask! Perhaps you've retained your faith in Jesus even though difficult things have happened to you or around you. But would you say that your faith is UNCOMMON? Is it super strong? Is it as rare as a blue-eyed, bald, 27 year-old third baseman whose mother is named Gertrude swinging and missing on the 3rd pitch each time he's up in a game that starts after noon on a Sunday? Are you separated from the crowd of believers because of the depth of your faith? Would Jesus, if he were physically standing here this morning, say about you, , **"I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel"**?

There are very few of us, I bet, who would step forward and say *"That's me! It's like he's talking about me!"* A humble and deep faith like that centurion's wouldn't do that. And I bet we know our weaknesses of faith well enough to understand our need to repent to Jesus for our lack of faith sometimes and our weakness of faith and the doubt we harbor in our hearts even while we're requesting something from God. Jesus lived and died and rose again to forgive those sins too...and he does.

What do we do if we admire this centurion and, because of Jesus' love for us, want to please Jesus with our faith as that centurion did? He had perhaps seen Jesus and listened to him. He had absolutely heard about him—and probably a lot since much of Jesus' ministry took place in and around the Sea of Galilee and Capernaum in particular. Great for him, but what about us? How do we get that strong faith today? Diligent use of God's Word.

It's so easy these days to hear of Jesus and have him speak to us because his Word is so accessible. There are Bible apps for your phone and tablet. (I just got my WELS Mobile App for my phone this week.) You can get daily devotions automatically delivered to your email. You've got a Bible or two at home. You may even have one in your car and at work. There's even a summer Bible reading schedule out today in the fellowship hall to help you!

The Holy Spirit works through the Word to create a greater trust in Jesus our Savior and to help each day with our concerns—whether they be a sick and dying friend like the centurion or other stuff like aging parents, children to raise, bills to pay, never-ending health concerns, relationships. And finally, it is this faith in Jesus that will be the only important thing when on the Last Day we will stand before the holy God. Faith in Jesus as our Savior is the only thing that matters that day and on into eternity. The faith we have today is a testimony to God's grace because it was not just UNLIKELY, but impossible without him. The UNCOMMON faith of centurion is uplifting to see and provides us with a reminder to keep our faith strong so that on that Last Day we will stand with Jesus in heaven. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.