

## **As The World Gives**

A Memorial Day Message by Pastor Nicholas W. Gliha, preached 5-26-2019

**Hey:** I used to work the morning shift at Dunkin' Donuts, 5am-1pm generally. The doors are locked between the hours of 9pm-5am for safety reasons, so only drive thru is the way to get food and coffee. One morning I came in and saw a man sitting outside, this particular morning was very chilly, 28-30 at best with a freezing rain. Once the door opened up he came inside and stepped up to the counter. A scruffy, dirty beard adorned his rugged face. He asked for a coffee, but said he no money to pay for it. His eyes fell low, and he failed to make eye contact. I went in the back to get my manager, John. John comped the order and gave the man an extra large coffee for free, as well as a free sandwich.

As I packaging the sandwich our coffee timer telling us to brew a new pot went off. It makes a startlingly loud series of beeps. The man instantly hit the ground. At that moment I saw what John had seen, this man was a homeless veteran, beyond that he suffers from PTSD. John, who also served in the army went over to the man and helped him up, hugged him, and told him he is not forgotten. The man said a chilling statement that lays the foundation for this message. "I just don't want to only be remembered after I have died."

**You:** We only formally recognize those fallen in battle once a year, but how often to do recognize those that have a fallen spirit? More personally, how often do we formally recognize our own spirit with God?

**Look:** This very challenge can be extrapolated from our scripture of Luke 7:1-10, the story of Jesus healing the centurion's slave. To make sense of the first verse when it says "After Jesus finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people", we must look at the previous chapter. This story comes right after the sermon on the plains of Luke 6, where we get some of the most famous sayings of Jesus surrounding how we should act. Stories such as turning the other cheek, the good fruit and bad fruit, and lastly the

house build on solid foundation vs poor foundation. A story that is about those who hear what Jesus says and acts upon it rather than only hearing it. Coming off these challenges Jesus heals the centurion's slave. The centurion then has two groups represent him, and the gospels writers do such an incredible job of writing this is it can make the reader momentarily forget that these two parties aren't even in the same vicinity of each other, they are speaking through messengers. First, we have the Jewish elders go to Jesus and speak on the centurions behalf. Jesus was a Jew, so who better to convince him then the very elders of his faith? Interestingly, the Jewish elders determine this man's worth not because of his character towards the regard he holds for the slave, but instead of financial value. "He loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." Building costs money, and a roman commander carried a great deal of Dinarii on him.

When we think of the man that came into Dunkin he did not have any money on him, and yet, John saw a grander character than simply his economic worth. John saw his story, his mission, and his love for our country.

Jesus become interested and decides to go with them to the house. Before he can reach the house though, friends of this gentile stop Jesus and beg of him *not* to come. If you looked closely enough the author made these gentiles speak in the first person, to make it sound like it is the centurion himself talking to Jesus. He says that he is unworthy to have Jesus in his home, but if only he would say the word his servant would be healed. Let's pause here for a moment and break down the important lessons that can be found in this. A gentile is a non Jew, in this case it is a soldier of Rome. Regarding the veteran from our opening tale, this man would have been a Japanese, a Korean, a vietnamese, an iranian or other middle eastern, or cultures we have warred with.

That is the relationship that Jews had with Romans. The 'enemy' shows a great deal of respect to Jesus and his faith by requesting him not to come to the house, because as a gentile his house would

have been unclean and would have been unfit for Jesus to enter without first and after performing lengthy cleansing rituals.

He believes that simply through faith, Jesus can restore his servant even from the distance that he currently is at. Are you in a place where you feel uncomfortable? Do you feel the anxiety and the fear our veteran had from the beginning? Do you feel like the outsider looking in at the party? Or do you feel a mournful and broken heart as you remember fallen family and friends this weekend?

Well if you put faith in God that God can bring assurance to your heavy heart, that God can lift those weary eyes, and that God can whisper into your ear that you are made perfect in God's image and that you are never an outsider looking in. The next part is the most amazing though. Finally, the soldier professes that he also is a man of authority, with people both below and above him. How he can command people and they do it. Jesus is amazed by this and tells the Jewish crowd whom he just preached too about living a good life in the sermon on the plains "I have not seen such faith of any of you." What exactly amazed Jesus though? What did this man say that was so striking?

Remember this man was not a Jew, therefore he did not follow the Jewish "God" as we know God, or "YHWH" as they would have said. Yet, he refers to Jesus as Lord, and even recognizes Jesus authority as being one with God. For this man, who follows the roman authority system of client patron, to say Jesus had higher authority than the roman emperor was extraordinary radical, and surely put himself in a position to make some enemies. But he was willing to look beyond what he knew to be right and true to have an open mind that a blessing could come from the "other." If you read all of Luke up until this point Jesus is referred to as "Son of Joseph" by the people of Israel.

In other words, he was not recognized as having authority by anyone in Israel until this gentile said it. Whoever has had a blessing come from the very last source you would expect? (raise hand) exactly, that is how it felt for Christ.

That is the reason Jesus was so moved by this man, not only did he express profound love for his neighbor, respect for his 'enemies' faith, but also immense respect to Jesus as being more than the son of a carpenter. But Jesus did not have authority over anyone, well, he surely did, but he never held himself that way. Jesus had authority WITH God, and empowered others around him to also have this power with God. His closet disciples also learned how to heal and perform miracles. When I look at the way John interacted with the veteran that day I know that God is fully alive in the world and a God that can create this expansive universe is capable of giving us that same authority to bring about great miracles to those in need. Jesus loves the lowly, and loves the successful and that mean that Jesus loves you and me today.

**Do:** What did Jesus do that day? And what are we to do in response? Jesus turned on its head the prevailing understanding of who was invited to the welcome table, by his willingness to restore health based not on who held the printed invitation, but on who by faith was willing to walk through God's front door of mercy. To the veteran that walked into dunkin that day, there was an invisible line between that man's cognition of the world and the way we see it. For me, him falling to the ground was startling, but for John, he saw the war the man was still in. The ability to step into the shoes of others is not only a challenge by Jesus but is a quintessential part of being a follower of Christ. To be considered a family member of Jesus one must not only hear God's work but put it into practice as seen by Jesus denying his family in Luke 8.

War is something humans have known their entire existence, and 17 years later we are still considered to be engaged in the war in afghanistan. But war is not always guns and oversea crusades. We have social wars today. The war between red and blue, the war between profit and exploitation, the wars of lingering racism, and in light of the abortion laws passing in a few states I've seen many women describe this era in our country as a war on women, the war on those above and below us in the

authority line. The geopolitical, socioeconomic wars of the 21st century are just as devastating, and we, like the centurion, the slave, and the Israelite people have a choice in how we will respond to the war. Jesus praised one man for his actions of standing against the most powerful emperor in the world at the time and giving that glory to God as having the most authority. That same day, Jesus turned around and looked at the crowd and said I haven't seen that kind of faith in any of you. Christians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have the choice to make. Are we the centurion, or are we the crowd?

Jesus is not saying we must agree with these people. Jesus did not convert that man to Christianity, nor did Jesus convert to a gentile faith. They met halfway at being a good person and a beautiful act of holy ground was created on the streets of ancient Judah that day. Coming off the back of General conference where we opted to not take the middle road option and validate exclusive language, we can see the effects of this social war we live in. Thousands of churches have pulled apportionments that go to help communities in need, thousands of people have left the church - including some beloved people of our own church, universities and seminaries across the country are disaffiliation from the church, and the hate between left and right is at an all time high. Because we were the crowd that day. Not the centurion.

We can debate over orthodoxy for the rest of our days of which faith is right, or which denomination, or which political agenda is the best, and how to interpret this fundamentally flawed but beautiful book but instead of orthodoxy, let us transition to orthopraxis. The practice of the church. Let us make an effort to go above and beyond the walls of this building to be the centurion to other people who differ from us. To love God, to love our neighbor. That's it. Wesley taught us 3 very basic tenants to follow. Do good, do no harm, and stay in love with God. If we truly follow the incredible man that was John Wesley, are we doing these three simple rules? To follow these three simple rules means that we are challenged to "guard our lips, our mind and our heart so that our language will not disparage, injure or wound another child of God. We must do no harm, even while we seek a common goal. This veteran

said the chilling message of "I don't only want to be remembered when I die", then we must make an effort to step into their shoes and love them through their PTSD and anxieties. This is a man who is not dead yet, but is a shadow of his true self, the soldier. A man who feels disconnected from his identity. If we fail to do good, do no harm, and to stay in love with God than we are also losing our identity as Christians, we too, are living as a shadow of our true selves in a covenant with God.

Memorial day is such a hard day for the church, and the world. In one way we don't want to encourage war, or to idolize the USA in nationalism, but we also want to say thank you for the souls that have been lost. I believe in a God that is capable of doing remarkable things. I believe that God is able, and will bring peace to the world and that one day we will live in a world without a war. It won't happen during my lifetime, and it won't happen during my children's lifetime. But we are making progress. I believe that God will fulfil the words of Isaiah 2:4 when he said He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. On the other hand the Bible tell us that there is no greater glory than to lay one's life down for their country, and for that reason I cannot thank those that died for me, and for us, enough. But I believe in a God that will bring about peace where no more will need to die. The centurion saw it those many years ago, and we too can carry on the legacy of powerful practice today.

God is all powerful, all loving and all capable. God is willing and ready to respond to our big prayers in life. Dream big, pray big, just as the centurion did, and I can promise you that God will bring blessings unto your life, and bring peace back to God's beautiful garden we call Earth. As we walk this garden God has created, let us not war with our brothers and sisters but let us walk hand in hand. Let us no longer be slaves to fear, and may we never give as the world gives. AMEN.

