

May 26, 2019

Luke 7:1-10

Memorial Day Weekend. Over time this has become a time set aside to remember those who died in war; a time of remembrance. This is a secular holiday. It is not on the church liturgical calendar. Nonetheless, it can be very beneficial for us in the church to take time to not only remember those who died, but also to reflect on how we might, some day, make such holidays unnecessary. This can begin by allowing Memorial Day, in the church, to be a time to reflect on what makes for peace, for God's peace, which is not just an absence of physical violence, but also true justice for all people, for all of creation.

What makes for peace, then? How do we live into God's peace?

Living into a just peace, God's peace is a whole way of life, which is why we gather into a faith community to help one another, and the world, practice living into God's peace, which is why I am not going to give you a whole plan on how you might go about this. That is far too complex. But I do want you give you a way of being in the world that is a vital component to our being able to live into God's peace. It comes from today's Gospel story. The example is so subtle, I almost missed it.

What we notice first, when we hear this story, is Jesus' ability to heal a person, able to heal from a distance. He does not need to be physically present;

he does not need to do a laying on of hands. Luke is telling us that Jesus is a divine healer.

Luke intends more though. If Luke was just interested in telling us about Jesus' healing powers, he would have used a fellow Jew, which he does in other places. Instead, it is a non-Jew, it is a Roman centurion, who requests his help, and Jesus gives it. For Luke it is important for the world to know that Jesus is the Messiah not just for the Jews, but for the whole world. Here we can plainly see that Luke's Gospel is written for a gentile audience.

There is a third layer to this story, though; one I almost missed. It is the fact that the person requesting Jesus' help is a Roman centurion, a commander of Roman soldiers; a leader of the most despised, hated people in all of Judea. Now, if you were a very zealous Zealot, any Roman soldier would be the equivalent of a soldier who willingly serves the Islamic State today. Does that give you a bit of an idea of what the Jewish elders were asking of Jesus?

We have been told that the centurion is a nice guy, possibly even a believer, certainly one who respected the beliefs of the Jews. Still, he is a leader of a group of occupying soldiers – and don't forget "occupy" here is a very harsh and brutal reality. Even the Jewish elders, who came to Jesus, would have understood if Jesus had refused to heal the servant.

But Jesus didn't refuse. "Jesus went with them," we are told. This is what is needed, if we want to live into God's peace. We must be willing to see the humanity in even our worst enemy and give of ourselves, when asked, if we are ever going to know God's peace.

This is true in our private lives and in the public arena as well. In the last few years there is a growing chorus of hate speech and actions by individuals, and many of our political leaders – on both sides of the isle. This inability to see our neighbor's humanity is adding to an already violent world. Whether the hate speech is about illegal immigrants, legal immigrants, Muslims, gays, or any other group we want to scapegoat our problems onto, such speech just feeds the violence and blocks all possibility of God's peace to enter our lives.

Just imagine if Jesus had refused the request of the Jewish elders. We probably would not have heard any of this story. More importantly, though, Jesus would not have learned of the centurion's strong faith; a faith that we can learn from. For you see, the centurion is risking himself as well. The Roman soldiers knew they were hated by the Jews, which fed their hatred of the Jews. The centurion's reaching out to the enemy could be seen as betrayal by his own soldiers. His compassion for his sick servant

overrode any concerns he might have had about other's thinking he was associating with the enemy. This two-way street of distrust, or trust, is still alive today. Someone has to "break the ice," has to step out in faith and offer an olive branch. We can do this

- by challenging people who use hate speech
- by seeking to learn more about people others are condemning, especially our Muslim brothers and sisters
- by showing solidarity with those cast out or cast aside

Such actions, and others, are how we can begin answering the question: What makes for God's peace?

It is my hope and my prayer that each one of us will take some time this Memorial Day Weekend to reflect on how we might try to live into God's peace each and every day, for this is the most appropriate way to honor those who have died and those who serve. Amen.

To help us live into God's peace, it is always helpful to "whistle while we work", so to speak. So let us join voices and sing "Give us peace."

*Dona nobis pacem. #297*

Hopefully it will be an encouraging earworm.