

Jesus and the Centurion

Luke writes about an officer in the Roman army and how his faith in Jesus led to the healing of a simple servant. It is a story about healing, about faith, and about the importance of caring for those around us. A centurion was a professional officer in the Roman army who commanded a "century" of between sixty and one hundred men. The position carried much responsibility and could prove hazardous in battle. Among the benefits of this prominent position was the luxury of living with one's family and household staff in the garrison. It is here where we meet our Roman centurion.

The centurion had a servant whom he was concerned about. With all of the responsibilities the centurion carried, clearly this was a gentle and caring man. He has heard of Jesus' healing power and knew that this was the one person who could help his servant. A Jewish elder is sent on his behalf to plead for Jesus to come to the garrison. Sending an elder from the temple is culturally sensitive. The centurion did not know Jesus personally. Jesus is Jewish, and the soldier sends appropriate representatives of Jesus' own ethnic background to plead his case. Our

soldier is also respectful of the teacher, as there is no demand made of Jesus, only a request.

When Jesus was approached with the request to come, he went. As Jesus and the elder approached the house, the centurion observed them coming and ran out to meet them. The soldier's humble greeting touched Jesus so much that it became an object lesson for those nearby. Jesus commended the centurion's faith and stated that the servant was already healed.

This is a story of faith. This Gentile soldier who made a living of war demonstrated faith that far exceeded what Jesus was finding in his ministry to the Jews. It amazed him. Pure faith still amazes those who encounter it. Nothing is more beautiful. Nothing is more powerful. It is this pure faith that is often found in children. Talk to your children about faith. Help them to put their faith into words and images. The journal activity they have been working on throughout the summer will help them to acquire new faith language.

The centurion had faith, certainly, but he took his belief one step further and he acted. He sent an emissary and asked for Jesus' help. Children, too, can learn to ask for what they need. This story can show them how to make a request with respect and humility. The rest is left to God.