

## Sermon for Proper 4 Year C

[RCL] 1 Kings 8:22-23, 41-43; Psalm 96:1-9; Galatians 1:1-12; Luke 7:1-10

The Great Fifty Days of Easter have come and gone. We prepared ourselves in Lent for the passion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. During the Great Fifty Days of Easter we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Last Sunday was Trinity Sunday where I am sure you learned about the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, here we are, in the season after Pentecost. We have the Holy Spirit dwelling among us. What does that mean to us then?

Today's scriptures give us some good pointers: Solomon intercedes for the "foreigners", Jesus is amazed by a centurion's faith, and Paul is astonished by how fast the early Christians forgot what they were taught.

In today's Hebrew scripture, we read part of I Kings Chapter 8. In the beginning of chapter eight, which is not included in today's reading, King Solomon has just finished building the grand temple for God. He "assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites" (I Kings 8: 1a) and prayed to God. The part we read is about Solomon praising God and God's faithfulness. The reading then jumps from verse 23 to 41. Solomon pledges to God to hear the foreigner who is not God's people of Israel, to hear this foreigner's prayers so "that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you." (1Kings 8:43). The missing verses are general prayers for the Israelites. Doesn't that tell us our care for foreigners is important?

In the Gospel, we have two persons of power. One holds military power, the other spiritual power. The one with military power is desperate because his valued slave is ill. He could have sent his soldiers to take Jesus to go to his place to heal his slave. Nevertheless, he asks Jewish elders instead to *invite* Jesus to heal his slave. Not only does he choose not to use violence, but he also uses his humility to show forth his trust and faith in Jesus. He has faith in Jesus and lets him know that there is no need for him to go to his humble dwelling, but asks Jesus heal his slave from a distance. Jesus, the spiritual leader is amazed at his faith. Jesus says, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." The cultural and class boundaries between these two leaders are brought down. A person is healed.

The scriptures today reminds me of an inspiring, and amazing story I want to share with you about the beginning of a Christian organization in a place where Christianity is not the dominant culture.

In Hong Kong, there is a place called St. James' Settlement. This settlement is a triad consisting of an Anglican Church, an Anglican school, and community service center. The story of how this place was founded is very inspiring. In 1949, the late Bishop Ronald Hall who oversaw the Anglican Church in Hong Kong saw the need to minister to a group of youth in a small town named Wanchai. The youth were hanging out in this town and had gotten into trouble. There were very limited resources then. He had no place available to gather them. The need was really

great. A Taoist Temple in the neighborhood had some rooms that were available for use. He worked with the minister in charge and was able to use a room to gather the youngsters and started the Boys' and Girls' Club. By gathering the youth, offering them the love and guidance that was lacking from the families, these youth escaped a downward path into juvenile delinquency. Because of their love of God's children, two different religious leaders were willing to work together to help the young people. This humble beginning of youth ministry in a Taoist Temple eventually became the triad it is today: a church, a school, and a community service center.

By not confining ministry to one's religious establishment, and focusing instead on the love of God's children, a Christian institution was formed with the help of Taoists. Great things have been done. Services have been extended beyond serving youth spiritually and academically to serving the wider needs of the community, the mentally and physically handicapped, and the elderly. The people of Hong Kong certainly know God's name through this Christian organization.

This is the message of today's Gospel. Because of the centurion's love for his slave, who had much lower social status, he is willing to seek help from another leader. Jesus shows us he is not confined to healing only Jewish people, but has compassion for the centurion's slave.

Due to instability and violence in the Middle East, the United States is experiencing an influx of refugees. However, the fear of terrorists infiltrating our country is so great that people, even Christians, oppose to the humanitarian act of accepting these people.

Saint Paul admonishes the Galatians and says that he is "astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel..." Jesus has commanded the disciples "to love your neighbors." What has happened to his teaching? Isn't this St. Paul's admonition? We are so quickly deserting the Gospel of Jesus, rejecting the neighbors who are foreigners and in dire situation. Can we learn something from the Centurion and the Taoist minister in Hong Kong?

In this season after Pentecost, we are learning how to apply Jesus' teaching in our ministries. Fresh into this season, we are shown Solomon's intercession for foreigners. This is what is expected from us, to love our neighbors even when they are not the same as us. Although they are foreigners, they are faithful like the centurion.

The Guthrie Center in Massachusetts was transformed from a church to a holy space that honors the traditions of many faiths. On the door entering the church, it is written:

One God – Many Forms  
One River – Many Streams  
One People – Many Faces  
One Mother – Many Children

King Solomon has built the house for God, but he asks, "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!"

(1King 8:27) Let us not confine God to our liking, our church, or our belief. God is much bigger than that. Let us follow Jesus' teaching to "love your neighbors." Amen.

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