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*"Christ caring for People
through People"*

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Matthew 8(5-13) (The Message)

As Jesus entered the village of Capernaum, a Roman captain came up in a panic and said, "Master, my servant is sick. He can't walk. He's in terrible pain."

Jesus said, "I'll come and heal him."

"Oh, no," said the captain. "I don't want to put you to all that trouble. Just give the order and my servant will be fine. I'm a man who takes orders and gives orders. I tell one soldier, 'Go,' and he goes; to another, 'Come,' and he comes; to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it."

Taken aback, Jesus said, "I've yet to come across this kind of simple trust in Israel, the very people who are supposed to know all about God and how he works. This man is the vanguard of many outsiders who will soon be coming from all directions—streaming in from the east, pouring in from the west, sitting down at God's kingdom banquet alongside Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Then those who grew up 'in the faith' but had no faith will find themselves out in the cold, outsiders to grace and wondering what happened."

Then Jesus turned to the captain and said, "Go. What you believed could happen has happened." At that moment his servant became well.

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Faith in God through Jesus his Son is not something we inherit. God has no grandchildren, only children. Sad to say there are many who have grown up in Christian homes, have gone to church most of their lives, have made substantial financial donations to the local church, have worked hard to live 'good' lives and to follow all the commandments but who still have no real faith in God. They may even have studied the Bible and have learned all about theology and yet never have personally met the God who wants to live within them. Head knowledge and intellectual studiousness are not the same as an open heart warmed by the presence of His Spirit.

Jesus walked and talked in the midst of a people who took their religion very seriously yet most of them did not have the faith and trust of this Roman captain, an outsider.

This story and Jesus' words hold a caution for each of us. Belief in, and love of God must involve all of our being, 'heart, and soul and mind and strength.' (The greatest commandment; Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul with all your mind and with all your strength.' Mark 12:29 or as Peterson says in The Message your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy.)

Over the next few weeks I plan to reflect on what this means in terms of developing a relationship with the Living God. Tom Holladay, a teaching pastor of Saddleback Church, California, has recently written a wonderful book about this titled The Relationship Principles of Jesus which I am presently studying and which is the source of what I would like to share.

Loving and merciful God, speak to us in heart and mind and soul that we may truly call you our eternal friend. Amen

(Rev.) John McGurrin