

This morning's (well, yesterday's by now) Gospel was [Luke 17:5-10](#); click the link to read it in a new window.

Talking about that through the day we found it perplexing. What is the causal relationship between faith and the self-effacing obedience of a slave? As we discussed it the story of the centurion came to mind from [Matthew 8:5-13](#), and that provided some key expansion of the Luke reading. The two together gave us a better idea of the causal link we were missing.

There are three central correspondences that we saw between these two verses such that the story of the centurion seemed that it might give understanding regarding the response to the disciples.

First, the disciples had asked Jesus to increase their faith, and Jesus exclaimed about the centurion that he had not found faith like his anywhere in Israel.

Second, to the disciples Jesus responded that they should, when they had obeyed what they had been given to do, consider themselves as unworthy, as only having done as they were told; the centurion saw himself as unworthy that Jesus should take his time to come to him.

Third, it was only necessary to give the order and it would be done. The centurion only had to give the order for whatever it was to be done; Jesus only had to give the order that the child be healed.

The essence of our understanding is this. The centurion knew his place in the chain of command; he was unquestioningly committed to carrying out the orders given him. When he had been given orders, he could without reservation, and with full authority, direct those under him to the fulfillment of those orders. There might or might not be strategic or tactical interpretation in the process; that would vary from situation to situation. However, he knew that once commissioned he had the full authority of his superiors to carry out his mission and he could proceed without doubt. Once fulfilled, his superiors might praise him, but that was not his to ask or require; he had simply done as he had been told, and his task was to carry out his next orders, whatever those might be.

So with us. Once we have been commissioned to do something by Jesus, we have his full backing and authority to carry it out. If that includes telling a mulberry tree to plant itself in the sea (not a natural result at all, or a normal way of accomplishing it), so be it; we could so order it. Our task, as was the centurion's, is to carry out what we have been told or to die trying. Our focus is to be exclusively on what Jesus has given us to do; when we have profoundly understood that, we can do so with the presence and authority to carry it out.

Significantly, this process is not about us, or about our feeling good about our giftings, or throwing our spiritual weight about, or any of the responses all too common today that focus on us. Much of the proclamation that we have seen in the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions is rooted in unbelief, trying to work up belief, or "stir up our faith", etc.

Does that mean we cannot feel good about what we see happening? Not at all. The deepest pleasure however is not because of us, but from our understanding that *his* purpose is being

accomplished, and his purpose has become ours. As we become more and more integrated into his life, his pleasure becomes ours.

I am not naive about this; I am all too well aware from first hand experience that we, as spiritual children, tend to think of ourselves first. Part of growth toward Jesus however is leaving that childish self-focus. If we do not outgrow that self-focus we risk settling for an addictive self-focused gratification which can never be satisfied, as it depends on our constantly doing greater things to bring that satisfaction. At that point we run the very real risk of having had from it what we want; as Jesus said, we will have had our reward. We also risk missing the point; I wonder if something like that didn't happen to those about whom Jesus said in Matthew 25, "Leave. I never knew you."

Doing what he says requires that we live consciously in what Jesus is about. We cannot see the whole picture, but we can constantly grow in that understanding, and we can live in what we do understand. When we understand what we have been given to do, our purpose is to fulfill that, and that cannot happen without constantly touching back to what we can understand and growing in it. That is why we have been given the Spirit, to show us these things, to draw us ever more toward him.

Our authority comes not from who we are in Christ, but from who he is in us. When we have understood that and fully commit ourselves to what *he* is about, counting ourselves as unworthy and doing as we have been given, when we want what he wants, I wonder if we won't begin to see these things begin to actualize.

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