

36.
2016.

29th May,

1 Kings 8:22-23 & 41-43. Psalm 96. Gal. 1:1-12. Luke 7:1b-10

We have, in the past weeks, been looking at Time, Talents & Treasure. How we spend our time, - the difference between gifts & abilities, - and what we have that we can share with others.

How many of you have written a C.V. for yourself?

What would you put on it? No – I'm not asking you to tell us, but compare that with what somebody else would write for you. I am guessing that they might suggest things that you wouldn't put because it sounds like showing off.

Take Margaret for instance – she might put that she is a musician – when we would say “she is a brilliant musician”. Angie might put that she loves cooking – we would say that she is an amazing cook. I could go on -

Take a look at the C.V. for the Centurion mentioned in this morning's Gospel.

He is a teacher, a leader of men, commands respect, can walk for miles, he is reliable, confident, has authority and is caring. What he hasn't put on it is that he considers himself unworthy or that his trust in Jesus is absolute.

All these are reasons why he had friends among the Jews.

Now, what we need to understand that the Jewish elders had little love for the Romans in general and Roman soldiers in particular.

We are told that this man loved Israel, though it was not the land of his birth. It is also evident that this man cared deeply about his young servant, and was very out of the ordinary socially. He crossed racial and ethical barriers when he, as a Gentile, appealed to a Jew for help.

This centurion must have been a very unique individual for the elders to be willing to approach Jesus on his behalf and notice that they say “He is worthy of you doing this for him – except of course it wasn't for him it was for his servant.

Yes – some Romans were bestial, but there must have been a lot (like this centurion) that were not.

The elders not only bring the man's request but they vouch for their Gentile friend.

We read in Luke that when Jesus heard their request, He marvelled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, “I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!”

In God's chosen people nobody had shown a faith such as this centurion.

Such was that faith that the servant was healed from a distance.

Only twice in the bible do we read that Jesus “marvelled” – one was in this story and the other was the opposite end of the scale. This was when he first started his ministry in his home town of Nazareth when he was rejected by his fellow Jews and it is said that he “marvelled at their lack of faith”. What a difference.

Let us write a C.V. for Jesus:- What would you put on this C.V.?

He is teacher, a leader of men, can walk for miles, reliable, confident, has authority, is caring, an enabler, heals the sick, changes hearts, loving, creator, has time for everybody and, most important of all, is the Son of God.

I wonder how he would have filled in the space for place of residence! Maybe “no fixed abode” as his address – not a good thing for an employer to see!

The centurion must have had an encounter with Jesus, perhaps many, to know as much about him as he did. That encounter changed him as a person. It enabled him to be different.

Have you had moments in time that you have encountered God?

When we were in Scotland last weekend we went on a Highland Safari in a Land Rover. The views were amazing - across valleys to mountains topped by snow – suns' rays touching parts of the scenery – other parts in shadow. Our guide told us that the view before us would have been exactly the same as viewed by people thousands of years ago. It was then that I encountered God again and realised what a small speck in time my lifespan was and to say "How great thou Art".

Sometimes these encounters are entirely unexpected – other times (i.e. in a service or prayer meeting they are a natural occurrence. What we can do is to listen out for God.

I want to read a poem to you – a poem that I used to know by heart way back when dinosaurs ruled the world. It's called "The touch of the Master's Hand".

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But held it up with a smile.
"What am I bid, good folks," he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"
"A dollar, a dollar. Then two! Only two?
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?"

"Three dollars, once; three dollars, twice;
Going for three..." But no,
From the room, far back, a grey-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening the loosened strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet,
As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said: "What am I bid for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.
"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
Two thousand! And who'll make it three?"

Three thousand, once; three thousand, twice,
And going and gone," said he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried,
"We do not quite understand.
What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply:
"twas he touch of the Master's hand."
And many a man with life out of tune,
battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd
Much like the old violin.

A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine,
A game -- and he travels on.
He is "going" once, and "going" twice,
He's "going" and almost "gone."
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought
By the touch of the Master's hand.

This is the effect Jesus can have on us – he is the Master and as the violin would need re-tuning from time to time to keep in tune, so it is with you and me. We need constant "re-tuning." That first encounter we had with him, and each subsequent encounter will change us as it changed the Centurion. Solomon had an encounter with God – it changed him. And, my goodness, how Paul's encounter with Jesus changed him!

Grace – is defined by some as "God's love in action towards men who merited the opposite of love." – or -
" the unmerited or undeserving favour of God to those who are under condemnation."

It is because of this amazing grace that you and I are here in church this morning.
Will we have an encounter with him today?
So we pray:-
As we continue on into the Eucharist, Lord, help us to encounter you in a very real way.
Amen