

# Sermon Text for June 18, 2023

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *Exodus 1:15-22, Matthew 8:5-13* *“A matter of faith II”*

I spent quite a bit of time working on a project that we are going to launch in just a few weeks. We received from the Lilly Endowment a pretty substantial grant that is called Rekindle. They are hoping to target churches as they come out of covid to rekindle the energy and the enthusiasm and the following of Jesus. Basically to get back on track. What I wrote for the grant was that we would use these funds to strengthen our individual and our collective faith. You'll be hearing more details about it as we move forward, but just so you know we will be together taking a journey of prayer, Scripture and action. All for the purpose of strengthening our collective and individual faith journeys.

My perpetual hope, and you have heard this from me before, is that any time anyone steps into the doors of this church, whether on a Sunday for worship or a Tuesday for the food bank or a Saturday for a wedding, when you step into the doors of this community you will find a group whose primary goal is to strengthen your relationship with Jesus, or if you do not know Him, that you would come to know him. There is nothing more important than that.

So if we are focusing on increasing our faith, the assumption is that our faith needs to be increased. Jesus says constantly to his disciples: Ye of little faith. So, without going to that extreme, we do need to be honest with ourselves and recognize that sometimes we will ride the coattails of faith. As a bit of an aside, I have a confession to make, I am the king of riding coattails. Growing up with the youngest of four boys with the other three being angels and extraordinary athletes and well liked and academically gifted, it wasn't hard.

I'll never forget in 7<sup>th</sup> grade my social studies teacher in front of the whole class said, Bronkema you have a 89 for the quarter, but since you're a Bronkema I'm going to give you an A. I don't know if she said that to motivate me, but I took it. That was true in high school where my brothers excelled and I was causing trouble in class, and also in college where my grade point average was about half of what my kids got in college. But I had a big brother who had gone before me. It is also true in my ministry, when we were working in the orphanage in Italy I consistently met people who knew my dad and so gave me the benefit of the doubt for just about anything.

But coattails do not extend to matters of faith. Earlier in this chapter Jesus tells the Pharisees who brag about having Abraham as their father that God is able to raise up more

obedient children from the very stones that were laying about. For matters of faith, you cannot ride coattails. Every child, every adult has to claim Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and not hope and think that just because they step into these doors that they are somehow able to ride coattails to eternal life. Only faith in Jesus can provide that eternal life. This is a matter of faith.

Both of our Scriptures today demonstrate people who clearly claim God as their own in situations where it would have been easier to just let things lie and kind of ride coattails to wherever they would take you. For Mother's Day we saw a matter of faith part one, and we saw a woman with great faith as she was healed from an infirmity that affected her for years. Today, in our New Testament on this Father's Day, we read about a father who has the faith that allows Jesus to work in his life to heal his son. May we have that same faith. Let's read.

### **READ**

I am sure that most of you have probably heard about the story of the midwives in Exodus and how they acted to save the boys of Israel from the hands of Pharaoh. It marks the beginning of the life of Moses and we see 12 women who were instrumental in saving Moses in his life, the first two are these Shiprah and Puah. There are two verses that I want you to focus on and they are vs. 17 and vs.21 where we read that the midwives, the heroines of this story, feared God. The unspoken comparison is that they obviously feared God more than they feared Pharaoh.

They believed that obeying God was more important than obeying Pharaoh. What does that say about their faith? It says that their faith was found more in God than it was on Pharaoh and they were willing to risk their lives to obey God. Is there any stronger faith than someone who is willing to risk their lives in order to follow God. It would have been easier to follow the commands of Pharaoh, no one would have blamed them for doing it.

Over history people have been given the choice of obeying the commands of an unjust ruler, or obeying God. It is a matter of faith to obey God, but it is easier to ride coattails and just continue along with what culture and society are doing. The only way to describe what these midwives did is civil disobedience. I know that for some of you that may be a charged term, but they disobeyed the laws of the land that Pharaoh set out in order for them to obey God. It was simply a matter of faith.

How often do we make decisions in our lives as a matter of faith? How often are we confronted with what may seem an easy solution and an easy decision when all along it just might be a matter of faith to go the other way? What we find in Exodus is that God is able to use the faith of the midwives to prepare the way of liberation for the people of Israel. Moses comes

out of that act of civil disobedience until the moment he confronts Pharaoh with God's words in his mouth as he tells Pharaoh, let my people God.

There have been clear parallels drawn within our own nation's history between the slavery of the Israelites and the slavery that was present right here. From that slavery we saw it evolve into laws and customs that continued the injustice to today where we see a system of mass incarceration that is a modern day slavery. As a church we recognize the national holiday June 19<sup>th</sup> as a matter of faith where we hope it will lead to clear reconciliation and justice.

When we get to Jesus' miracle of healing in Matthew 8 we clearly see the faith of the centurion as that which was the catalyst for that miracle. We call it a Matter of Faith II because of what we saw for Mother's Day. But there is a clear lesson to be learned here about our own faith. I want us to leave today to ask ourselves how do I make decisions based upon my faith. Or is my faith used to justify my actions as opposed to my faith being the primary reason why I make my decisions.

Let's turn to Matthew where we find Jesus right after the sermon on the Mount. In staff meeting this week people commented that we were moving at light speed since we are already in chapter 8. Well, I jumped ahead for Father's Day, we will be going back to finish up the sermon on the Mount. But here Jesus is having just displayed his power in the words of the sermon on the mount, and now it is time to display his power in his actions with a series of healings that take place.

We read that he heads to his hometown, and when we hear about Jesus' hometown we think of Nazareth or Bethlehem, but did you know that Matthew tells us in chapter 4:13 that Jesus made his home as an adult in Capernaum? It does, this is why Capernaum is such an important stop along the way when we go to Israel. As he heads there he first heals a leper and then he encounters a centurion, a Roman Soldier, who tells Jesus his desperate situation. Now, let's set the stage for who this centurion, this soldier was.

He was clearly and outside, not Jewish, not someone who could ride anyone's coattails into the kingdom of God. Like the leper that Jesus heals earlier in this chapter, he would not have been accepted into the community of faith because of who he was. He approaches Jesus and asks him, our translation states my servant. Now, it is interesting, there are two things that he says that in the Greek can be translated in very different ways that would provide a richness to the story that otherwise might be lost.

The word used here by the soldier is not *doulos*, which is normally the word used for servant, nor is it *uion*, which is normally used for son, but it is *pais* which in Greek can mean one

or the other, servant or son. Does the story change for you if this is a father pleading to Jesus to heal his son? It does for me, especially on this Father's Day. Then Jesus' response which in our translation is a promise where Jesus says: I will come and cure him. Most commentators believe that this is really in the form of a question. You want me to come to your house and heal him? So if the dialogue went this way: Jesus, my son is at home paralyzed and in so much pain. Do you want me to come to your house and heal him?

Who are you, a Roman citizen, who has nothing to do with the God that I serve and that I love, to ask me to do such a thing? You see a Jewish rabbi would never go into the house of a gentile. This is a very interesting thing for a soldier to ask of a rabbi. But what he says next is even more interesting. He demurs to Jesus and says, no, you don't have to come to my house, I recognize your authority. Just like I can tell people what to do in my position of power and authority, you also have power and authority over all of nature and you just have to say the Word, and it will be done as you have said. You have that ability and that power. I believe in you. The soldier recognizes that Jesus has the authority to issue commands on God's behalf.

Jesus is stunned, the Scripture says in vs.10 that he was amazed. What would it take for you to amaze Jesus? Have you ever thought of that? What decision in your life could you make that would surprise Jesus, that would amaze him. What matter of faith could you take part in that would shock Jesus? The soldier recognizes Jesus as the Messiah, the Lord, by whose power and authority the excluded are included.

Jesus responds in vs.10 in a way that shocks and amazes the reader. "In no one in Israel have I found such faith." Look at the beginning of vs.10 and to whom is he saying this? He says to those who followed him. Who are the ones who followed him? His disciples, remember them, the same ones that we saw last week that he said to them in Matthew 6:30, oh you of little faith? So, how are you feeling right about now? You have left everything, you have been following Jesus day in and day out and this outsider, this stranger, this gentile comes along and Jesus lifts up his faith as something that he has not seen from anyone around him. Followers, you can't ride my coattails. You have to believe in my authority, in my power, that I am not only the son of God but the living God himself, like this guy believes in me.

In this case we see that Jesus has the power and the authority who is able to include the excluded, and wants to include all into the eternal banquet. But it is still a matter of faith and that faith all are able to have not by birthright, or not by membership, but by faith. May we look at our own lives and discern where we are hoping to ride the coattails and where we are loving Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Amen.