

Holy Trinity Sunningdale
Sunday 22 June, 2025 – 1st Sunday after Trinity
Readings – Psalm 33 & Matthew 8:5-13

Today, I want to explore with you the power of words. First, we begin with the power in God's words as in our reading from Psalm 33. Verse 6 says, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth." Verse 9 says, "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm." As a result the Psalmist says, "Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him."

Our Gospel reading shows the centurion recognising the power and authority in Jesus' word thereby demonstrating great faith. Where do I find myself in this story? Am I the centurion, humble enough to ask for help but bold and quick to express what I believe? Am I the servant, suffering and waiting for healing? Or am I one of the disciples, watching, maybe a bit offended that Jesus says a mere Gentile has more faith than I do? Today, our focus is on the centurion.

The centurion's quick response might have come from his experience in the army. He understood that if someone with authority commands something to be done, it gets done with no questions asked. Our own experience with authority might be different. If those in authority over me have made promises they couldn't keep, if I have been forgotten and overlooked by those in authority over me, if I am unable to forgive those in authority who have let me down, then I might be burdened with disappointment or cynicism, causing me to respond to people in authority with lack of faith or unbelief or scepticism. My past experiences with authority might also predispose me to respond to God either in faith or in unbelief.

Stemming from his experience with authority, the centurion recognized Jesus as someone with authority. But, it was with words that he responded to Jesus. What do you hear from his words? Matthew says, "When Jesus heard this, he marvelled," and said he has not found such faith in anyone in Israel. Because of his words, Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment!

Our words to one another have power too. We are made in God's image and if God's words have power, so do our words. The power to help others, the power to encourage others, the power to get the help we need, all come through our spoken words. The centurion went looking for Jesus because he knew Jesus has the power to heal. When Jesus said he would go to his house, the centurion did not hesitate to say what he knew to be true. He did not allow the prejudice of seeing Jesus as a Jew – a conquered people and himself as a Roman from the conquering race stop him from recognising the superior qualities in Jesus. He did not give room to unconscious bias. He spoke out his need for help – he confessed his inability to help himself, he gave Jesus the honour he deserves confirming that Jesus has the authority and the power to heal and he doesn't.

In addition, the centurion responded the very moment Jesus said he would go with him. He did not procrastinate, he did not put it off till another time neither did he wait

for Jesus to prove himself first before expressing his belief in Jesus' ability to do what he had asked.

Let's read together from the screen: - you may read out loud or silently.

"I remember when I took your new car on the road and wrecked it. I thought you would be livid and come down hard on me, but you didn't."

"I remember when we went to the beach, and you didn't want to go because you said it was going to rain. We went, and it rained. I was sure you would rub it in and say, "I told you so!" But you didn't."

"Then there was the time when I spilled blueberry juice down the front of your new white tuxedo. I knew you would be upset and blame me. But you didn't."

"And remember that formal evening? I was mistaken and told you it was casual. You wore blue jeans and felt like a fish out of water. I was sure you would storm out in anger and leave me standing there. But you didn't."

"I wanted to tell you how much I loved you and how much I appreciated you for all those things when you returned from Afghanistan. But – you didn't...."

What are the unspoken words someone needs to hear from you? Few things are more effective than the right words spoken at the right time. Unspoken words of kindness and love may become heavy burdens to live with. We must not allow shyness, pride, cynicism or fear of rejection keep us from saying what needs to be said.

Let us pray:

Lord, we yield ourselves to you in this present moment, laying aside past disappointments and judgments we have made about others and even about you. Give us humility, boldness and faith today. Amen.

Dolapo Ogunbawo