

**Pentecost C2**  
**May 29, 2016**  
**“Limping”**  
**Central Presbyterian Church, Montclair**  
**David Noble**

**Luke 7:1-10**

7After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. <sup>2</sup>A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. <sup>3</sup>When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking (Jesus) to come and heal his slave. <sup>4</sup>When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy of having you do this for him, <sup>5</sup>for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us.” <sup>6</sup>And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, “Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; <sup>7</sup>therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. <sup>8</sup>For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and the slave does it.” <sup>9</sup>When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” <sup>10</sup>When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health

1.

I assume most of you have had the same experience as me—you hurt your foot or your knee or you pull a muscle in your leg, and you limp around until it heals and you can walk straight again. With one good leg and one that hurts you limp because the legs are different in strength and ability—they don’t walk in the same way and as a result your body stumbles and staggers.

The Prophet Elijah asks God’s people how long they want to be stumblers, how long they want to limp around. They walk as God’s people some of the time but the rest of the time they walk as followers of Baal, a whole different god. Make a choice Elijah says, either be God’s people or Baal’s people, but don’t be limping around because you want both.

The apostle Paul writes a letter to his church in Galatia. He gets right to the point, “I can’t believe your fickleness—how easily you have turned traitor to him who called you by the grace of Christ by embracing a variant message! It is not a minor variation, you know; it is completely other, an alien message, a no-message, a lie about God. Those who are provoking this agitation among you are turning the Message of Christ on its head.”

Paul’s people are limping too, confused about what exactly the gospel of Christ is supposed to be. Paul taught them one thing and now someone else is teaching them something different about being Christians. He says, I didn’t make it up you know. I didn’t get it second-hand from someone else who was my teacher. I got it straight from Jesus himself when he appeared to me. The God who sent Jesus to us is the one and only God who deserves glory.

2.

What do we glorify? What do we hold up as worthy of our praise and adoration? What is so important to us, so impressive, that we set God aside?

There was a congregation in Maryland that was very fortunate. A few years ago they had a pastor who was an expert at reading and translating the original Hebrew of the Old Testament and the original Greek of the New Testament. While he was teaching a class on Paul's Letter to the Galatians and translating it for them, he decided to translate into English the whole Bible just for them. But not just any English. He did it in such a way that the English of this new Bible sounded just like the English they used in their everyday lives living in Maryland. This Bible is called "The Message" and today's reading from Galatians was taken from The Message. Eugene Peterson, a Presbyterian pastor wrote that translation of the Bible, and when he was deep into the Old Testament, working on a translation of the prophet Isaiah, one of Rev. Peterson's students invited him to go along to a concert by Bono. And the student promised he could even introduce Peterson to the rock and roll legend himself. But Peterson was up against a deadline and said he couldn't go to the concert. And the student said, "A deadline is going to stop you? But it's Bono!" And Peterson, who had never heard of Bono said, "But it's Isaiah!"

The two did eventually meet. Peterson, 80 years old, and finished with his translation, went to a Bono concert and liked it, and the two have become friends. But their relationship is not because Bono is famous and Peterson is caught up in the popularity surrounding him. He has no interest in glorifying Bono. It turns out that Bono has read Peterson's translation of the Bible and some of his songs are based on the words of Peterson's translation. Now the two visit together not to glorify each other but to share their faith in God.

3.

One day a Roman centurion sent word to Jesus that he needed help. The centurion's slave was sick, about to die. The centurion asked Jesus to come heal him. Out of curiosity Jesus started to go. But as he was going more messengers came telling Jesus to stay where he was. There was no need to travel to the centurion's home. This centurion said he understood what it means to have authority. He tells people to do things and they do them. If he, as centurion, can say the word and make things happen, how much more can Jesus heal this servant, since Jesus has the ultimate authority. "I'm not worthy to have Jesus in my house," he says. "If he just speaks the word wherever he is, the healing will happen."

Jesus is amazed.

That's unusual. Jesus is amazed that this non-Jew, non-Christian centurion has so much trust in Jesus' power. Jesus says, "If only God's people trusted God that much."

4.

All of our scripture readings today ask the same question of us, "Why are you limping?" What is so important in your life that it competes with your devotion for God? Making money? Playing

sports? Devoting your time and energy to famous people? What does your schedule or your bank account show is most important to you? What do your text messages show, or the pictures on your phone reveal, about what you glorify?

In two Sundays we will celebrate the four members of this year's confirmation class. We might say we will celebrate them joining the church, but that isn't really what we celebrate at all. We will rejoice when we hear them answer the question on their own, "Who is your Lord and Savior?" with the words, "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior."

Simple question. Simple answer. Tough to keep saying it every day. Tough to join that centurion's humility and put Jesus at the top when so many other things that we like could go there. Tough to join Elijah and stand up to a crowd of people who insist there is a better god we could worship, a god who will let us say we follow Jesus and at the same time do what pleases us instead.

One of the things I love about worship, one of the things I count on, is the prayer of confession, the prayer that says I didn't get it right this week, again. I put other things first, not Jesus. And then I hear the most important words I hear all week. I am forgiven. I can start over. I can try again. I can do it differently this coming week... month... year. I am loved that much.

What we will celebrate in two weeks is 4 young people saying out loud that they want that love. They want to try to live in a way that glorifies that love. All of us who have joined the church have said these same words ourselves, and we will mouth those words along with them.

Why have a church, why not just worship at home alone? Because we need each other to keep us accountable to glorify that love of Jesus when other things might seem more important. Because we need to help each other with our limps and hear each other say, "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior."