

Remembrance Sunday ---

... *A Man Under Authority*

The sermon given by the Vicar, the Revd. Canon Jonathan Baker, at the Remembrance Service on 10 November 2019, in Beverley Minster.

Luke 7:1-10

“I also am a man under authority” – so says the Roman Centurion, who would have been a battle-hardened veteran, an officer who had earned his promotion the hard way. His batman is ill, and he sends messengers to Jesus, asking Jesus to heal the servant, but not wishing to put Jesus to any trouble. “For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me, and I say to one ‘Go’ and he goes, to another ‘Come’ and he comes.”

This Centurion seems to recognise that Jesus has a similar kind of authority and is part of the same line of command as the Centurion – “I also am a man under authority.”

I guess you sometimes get moments of recognition between people from the different branches of the armed services – the Army, Navy, RAF. Or between soldiers from opposing nations. They don’t know anything about each other, except that they are part of a similar system of authority in which orders are given and received. People in uniform recognise in each other something that sets them apart from civilians. The jobs they are given to do are those you can’t ask civilians to do. They serve and risk their lives so the rest of us don’t have to. They’ve seen things and experienced things that set them apart from civilians: so people in uniform have something in common even if the other uniform is the wrong colour.

So when the Centurion says “I also am a man under authority”, he is saying that he and Jesus have something in common.

But Jesus isn’t in a uniform.

Jesus isn’t part of any visible command structure.

Jesus hasn't got any divisions to deploy, any fleets to set sail, or any squadrons to take off.

So what is it that the Centurion thinks they have in common?

Too often, of course, the Church has pretended to be like the Centurion:

- we too love dressing up in uniform
- we too love our hierarchies and command structures and are sometimes tempted to give orders and expect obedience.
- we in the church love parading and putting on a good show.

And people have got the impression that God might be a bit like that – keeping control, giving orders, showing off His power. But in reality that kind of God died in the trenches of World War I – in the words of the song, “He’s hanging on the old barbed wire”. And in the Bible there is no sense of Jesus as a recruiting sergeant for that kind of God.

So what is it that the Centurion thinks he has in common with Jesus?

Maybe what he sees is not the authority of giving orders, but the authority that comes from showing solidarity – the Centurion cares about the batman, despite the difference in rank; soldiers know about showing solidarity with each other.

The authority of Jesus comes from showing solidarity with all of us – he is the Son of Man who is one of us; who has the authority to heal and transform lives because he stands alongside us and shares in the same risks and dangers.

On Easter Day this year in Sri Lanka, suicide bombers targeted Roman Catholic churches, killing hundreds. One of these churches has now been repaired and brought back into use. But there are reminders of what happened. On a wall they have left a square metre unrepaired. It is pock-marked with the ball-bearings which the bomber packed around his body along with the explosive. On the floor they have marked the site in the middle of the congregation where he detonated the bomb. And near the altar is a plaster statue of Jesus, four feet high, holding out his arms. It's not a very beautiful statue, but they've taken the decision not to clean it up – so it is spattered from head to toe in the blood of victims. It's been left like that not out of a ghoulish desire to hold on to the horror, but because it says something about the God who is worshipped there – a God whose authority comes from the vulnerability

of love. A God whose authority comes from the fact that he loves us so much he holds nothing back. This is the authority of love, of forgiveness, of solidarity. And it changes people, just as it changed both the Centurion and his servant.

This Remembrance Sunday, as we remember and give thanks for those who lost their lives showing solidarity with others, let us also remember and give thanks for the Son of God, who gave his life on the cross to show that he stands alongside us.

He stands alongside is in the barrack room and in basic training, in deployment and in action, in boredom and in fear, in pain and in the fear of death. He shows solidarity with us so that we may know life and love in the midst of everything that seems to deny it.

“I also am a man under authority.” - The Centurion recognised that authority to bring healing and peace.

May you also recognise the authority of Jesus; and may bring you into solidarity with God’s love, and the knowledge of healing and peace that follows.

Reading Texts

Luke 7:1-10

¹ After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. ³ When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." ⁶ 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; ⁷ therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸ 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." ⁹ 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." ¹⁰ When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.