



ST GEORGE'S

LUKE 7:1-11

What is the best idea you've ever had?

Pasta fork that winds itself? Fat burning anti-acid?

I am an ideas guy. Tons of them. All of the time – what if we did this? What if we did that? Wouldn't it be great if we did...and sometimes my team look at me, like...erm well...I mean you could run a zip line from the church to the hall...we could make a roof terrace on the church roof but...it's possible to perhaps build a band stand in the front but I think that the permanent pizza oven might be too much...

Those all came to me in the last week. And the difference, the difference between an idea and an action is to do with power. Can we make this thing happen? What do we need? I may have power through my money – I can pay for someone else to install a zip line or skill I can install it myself, or I can have persuasive power and say to my PCC – what this church really needs to grow and become more close to the presence of God is a zip line – kids will flock from miles around, fantastic views over the park – it'll be fantastic. We can raise money etc etc...and get us to others to spend...you get the idea.

It's power. Power is what makes things happen. We're all given different levels of it and in time we develop different aspects of it. As you advance your career – you begin with close to zero – when I was a supermarket boy – in Sainsburys at 15 - doing the tills, you take the money in and do what the computer tells you to do. Someone came over to me once and told me it was a disgrace that J Sainsburys a fine British institution was being infiltrated by Americanisms because it allowed the shortening of Barbecue to BBQ. Like I could do anything at all. My power was whether I put the number in correctly which could go wrong. I once learnt a little shortcut for 'Misc – ISB' which I used when something was missing a sticker and I thought was very helpful little code meaning misc. I didn't realise ISB stood for 'In-store bakery' and the bakers had just got a bonus for increased sales...power. But nobody listened to me, because I was a till boy. I couldn't purposefully give the bakers a bonus – it wasn't really in my control. If I'd stayed on, I might have become a supervisor, manager and then you gradually get more – charge over systems, people.

The Centurion in the gospel story is middle management. A soldier was paid 75 denarii – centurion paid about 3,500 denarii a year – with charge normally over about 100 soldiers (century – centurion) But over those soldiers he has authority.

'I say to one, "go" and he goes and to another "come" and he comes, to my slave "do this"...

The centurion has a sphere of power in which he can make things happen. Do this, do that. This is a form of power. But he's encountered something beyond his means. Sickness.

'A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly and who was ill and close to death'.

A quick insight into slavery here from the first century. Firstly, we have no idea what nationality the centurion was – he's not Jewish is about it – and we have no idea the nationality of who the slave was. So it's not the image of slavery we have in our minds – as centurions could come from across the sprawling Roman empire, this is not a racialised form of slavery. Instead many Romans owned slaves of the same nationality as themselves. Some were captured as part of warfare, some traded, some sold their children into slavery to help pay the bills. Life was harsh but treatment was highly varied depending on the master and indeed opinions on how slaves were to be treated varied considerably. Here the slave is 'valued highly' but cannot be saved. The centurion has come to the end of his powers and cannot save this man. The sickness.

What's more we see that the centurion actually increases his power by kindness. It's not the military man himself that visits Jesus – it's Jewish representatives that appeal to Jesus to come – this man is good he loves our people and he built our synagogue. He might even be what was a 'god fearer' one who worshipped Yahweh but didn't make a full conversion.

Just quickly here – Jesus works with those on the outside. The Jews work with those on the outside. We'll do the same here at St Georges. We're not trying to build a holy huddle here – impregnable to those outside. If people want to get involved with our life – especially if they are zip line builders – they're welcome. We've just been awarded some money from a local charity for helping to support lonely people in the parish. It's not our money, it's been raised by another one. But our goals are the same and we'll work together. The Christmas fayre only worked because we had more than just our immediate community to run it. We will work with a wider circle than those who come on Sunday. Jesus does it, we're going to do it, for the Earth is the Lord's and everything in it.

And somehow even the centurion comes to see that truth. Because for all of his power, even extended by his kindness he's come to the end of himself. He needs something more. And he's desperate. You don't send out an envoy, play your favours for nothing, he knows he needs the power he's heard of in Jesus. The power the Jews know only comes from God, only belongs to God. That power over created order.

We see it in the creation story where all is broken and chaotic and God speaks bringing order and calm. We see it in the Exodus as the waters are turned back and the people saved from death. We see it as the living word of God, Jesus says Go, your servant will be well. He says and it is so. And so the centurion steps out in faith and even Jesus is amazed at his faith.

This is our God.

And he hears our prayers. He is the one to answer. So when you pray, do not say, oh erm, if I was just wondering if, you might consider and I well nevermind. No. As children of God, we say Lord, we ask for your healing. Lord we ask for the money to pay that bill. Lord we ask for our daily bread. We ask for our needs, for the needs of others and we believe God is able. Sometimes he says no. Sometimes he says not yet. But like the centurion it's not our job to guarantee the result of our prayer, it's our job to pray it.

In our own journey here at St Georges. We're stepping out. I say Lord, I believe you've called us to start this new service but we don't have a band. Six months later, I've got four different band leaders, and a regular midweek service. I say Lord, I see these lonely people you love in this community and I want to support them, but I can't do it alone. We're given 3000 pounds from people that don't even know us. Faith, St Georges, this is what we're called to. I can't see how but I believe who, I trust you Lord.