

Luke 7:1-17 Jesus heals the Centurion's slave and raises the widow's son

Our passage today includes two stories of healing that are right to be held together. In many Bibles they are treated as two different stories, with two different subheadings “Jesus heals a Centurion’s servant,” and “Jesus raises a widow’s son.” While each story is important on its own, much insight can be gained by keeping them together.

By keeping them together as one story their differences become illustrative, and we learn more about the way of Christ.

1. Healing takes many forms. For the Centurion’s servant, the healing took place at a great distance. Jesus was not in the room and never met with the Centurion nor his servant. For the widow’s son, he approached the stretcher, and touched it. His proximity to the widow and her son stands in contrast to the distance he has to the Centurion.
2. The cleanliness laws were not an issue. Jesus is willing to go to the Gentile’s home and risk becoming unclean. It is only at the request of the Centurion that he stops. Then, by touching the stretch of a dead body, Jesus would undoubtedly become unclean. He does so anyway—even though he clearly did not have to.
3. Faith is not an issue, but compassion is. While faith and authority was a topic of discussion between Jesus and the Centurion, the widow expressed no faith at all. The only thing that moved Jesus to heal the widow was his own compassion. Similarly, it was the Centurion’s compassion toward his Jewish neighbors that initiated the encounter with Jesus.
4. The “object” of the healing wasn’t important either. In both cases, the person being healed had very little to do with the story.



Healing the servant of the Centurion, fresco, Dionysiou Monastery, Holy Mountain, 1547

We get more meaning from these two healing by looking at the Centurion and the widow than we do the servant and the son. Within the cultural context of power and status, the Centurion and the widow who lost her only son would be polar opposites. The Centurion was in the direct chain of command, traceable to the Emperor. For the people of Galilee, he WAS the Emperor. The widow on the other hand could not be more vulnerable. With no husband and now now son, she would have been left with nothing.

The Centurion, in asking Jesus for help, places himself under the authority of Jesus. He acknowledges that his own power would be under that of Jesus. He is pulled down, and placed under Christ. On the other hand, Jesus looks at the dead son of the widow and says, “Rise up.” He is literally raising up the lowly and pulling down the powerful.

In these stories—which are rightly held together, we see Jesus enact the song that Mary sang at her conception.

“He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.” (Luke 1:52)