

## ***Jesus and the Soldier***

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Maple Grove UMC

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**2 Timothy 1:9** He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.

### **Matthew 8: 5-10, 13**

<sup>5</sup>When he entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, appealing to him <sup>6</sup>and saying, “Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, in terrible distress.” <sup>7</sup>And he said to him, “I will come and cure him.” <sup>8</sup>The centurion answered, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed. <sup>9</sup>For I also am a man 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>10</sup>When Jesus heard him, he was amazed and said to those who followed him, “Truly I tell you, in no one<sup>[a]</sup> in Israel have I found such faith. .” <sup>13</sup>And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.” And the servant was healed in that hour.

We know what God wants from us Jesus told us we are to give our lives for one another, we also know what he said about violence that which we inflict upon one another. So, what would he say to the soldier?

At his birth, Jesus' family fled to Egypt to escape the soldiers Herod sent to kill the newborn king of the Jews. The first encounter we know of in adulthood was the one we heard today, It

took place in Capernaum, Peter's hometown and Jesus' home base. A Centurian, a leader of 100 men of the occupying force that inhabited Israel Jesus' whole life. This soldier, a person of power and authority recognized that Jesus had his own, if of a different kind. He asked Jesus to heal his servant, gravely ill. Jesus agreed but the soldier then deferred. The text doesn't say why, but perhaps it was because of his being part of the occupying force. *"I am not worthy to receive you, but speak and he shall be healed."* Jesus was amazed at the centuriess faith in this healing power to transcend space. *"I have not found such great faith, even among my own."*

On Jesus last night, soldiers came with Judas and synagogue officials to the garden of Gethsemane, *Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, asked them, "Who is it you want?" "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. Jesus said, "I am he," and the soldiers drew back and fell to the ground.* Not the synagogue officials not Judas. Those last to fall at Jesus' feet in reverence, were those soldiers who came to arrest him. There were soldiers at foot of the cross, who ridiculed him, gambled for his linen covering and put a sword through his side. But there was also another Centurian, who stood guard that day. He would have seen Jesus' suffering, heard his cries, and his asking God's forgiveness for all who did not understand what they did. And upon Jesus' death, he proclaimed: *"Surely this man was the son of God."* And in their stories, all of us can see ourselves: For we, too, want healing for those we love, but wouldn't feel worthy to have Jesus enter our homes. We wear with all sorts of protecting armor go along with the crowd sometimes yet when goodness is revealed bow down in wonder.

We may stand silently by when evil is done but when grace and mercy are revealed we are moved to new awareness and deeper faith. Jesus sees us human beings for who we are; understands the ways we are compromised whether the woman at the well, the tax collector in the tree, the rich young man who wants everlasting

life, or the soldier who longs for one who served him to be well. *“He has saved us and called us to a holy life,”* says Paul in the second letter to Peter, *“not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”*

Matt Dresbach was a soldier who longed for one who served him to be well. A former Army Captain, who was deployed to Kandahar Province, Afghanistan from 2011 to 2012. His own interpreter, Fawad, had applied in 2014 for a special visa, but the process was bogged down and then stalled in past years, so Fawad was still there in Afghanistan when the Taliban took control. Matt had been working with a group of veterans here in Central Ohio to coordinate the evacuation of their interpreters and their families. I have copies here of Matt's account of heroic effort of the setbacks, the danger and toil and snares, the beating Fawad endured by the Taliban, the narrow escape from the bombing that took the brave and vulnerable. The illness of his young son, then missing two flights he was to board. Until Matt's high school friend's wife's cousin's wife's assistant's niece's husband on the ground at the Kabul airport was able to make sure they got out. And last week as part of Jeff and Ridhima's great clan of extended family and friends, for the baptism of their daughter Reya. Where their dear friend Matt and his friend Fawad with his wife and son. They all wanted to be here that morning to witness that moment, themselves witnesses to the power of love and friendship.

To move in the most terrible of situations and bring forth good. *“He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”* There is grace and purpose enough for thee.