

**Texts: 1 Kings 8:22-23, 41-43; Psalm 96:1-9; Galatians 1:1-12; Luke 7:1-10**

**I visited with June Hedberg this past Wednesday afternoon up at Crestview. This coming Wednesday will be her 97<sup>th</sup> birthday. She is this congregation's oldest living member, born in 1919. This morning, little Burke Matthew is about to become our newest living member. He is three months old. The generations of this congregation span nearly a century.**

**The Bible contains many genealogies, lists of generations. These lists can be found in the Old Testament books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, and Ezra, and in the New Testament books of Matthew and Luke. The genealogies of the Bible document the history of the people of Israel. They gave people a sense of identity within that grand sweep of history. And they demonstrated that Jesus himself belonged to this chosen people.**

**It's human nature to want to know where we came from. It's human nature to want to know about our ancestors. Genealogy helps us to know all that. It's a matter of pride among some people to trace ancestry back to the Mayflower, or the Donner party. In New Mexico, where I grew up, it was a matter of pride among some people to trace ancestry back to the colonists who received land grants from the King of Spain in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. There's a plaque downstairs that lists the names of the founding members of this congregation and little Burke's [ancestor] Cyrus Hall is named on that plaque.**

**The Bible is also filled with stories of people who were not named in the genealogies of the people of Israel. This morning's passages all speak to the question of how God deals with foreigners – people who are outside the covenant with Israel. In the reading from 1<sup>st</sup> Kings, Solomon prays to God to listen to and answer the prayer of any foreign person who**

comes before the house of the Lord. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul argues passionately that the gospel of Christ has been given to Gentile converts as well as to Jewish Christians. And in this morning's gospel, we find a Roman centurion asking Jesus to heal his sick servant.

It's worth taking a few minutes to think some more about this man, this centurion. He was the commander of 100 soldiers. That's where the word comes from – 100 – the same as the word “century.” The centurion represented the power of Rome. He was a member of the occupying army. He was a Gentile, although Luke is careful to tell us that he was friendly to the Jewish community of Capernaum. That's what we know. What we don't know is where he came from, or how many battles he had fought in. We don't know whether or not he had a family. We don't know why he cared so much for his servant, his slave.

This centurion was an outsider and he knew it. He didn't actually come to meet Jesus himself, and he didn't want Jesus to come into his house. But none of that matters. What does matter is that he had heard about Jesus and believed that Jesus could heal his slave. What matters is that he recognized that Jesus's authority came from God. He recognized Jesus' divine authority because he knew what it meant to have human authority. And Jesus understands that this man speaks out of his faith, and so in response the slave is healed.

I wonder how this story went over with those followers of Jesus who were the first to hear it told. After all, Luke probably wrote his gospel late in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, after the Roman army had destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and crushed the Jewish uprising.

**How surprising and maybe appalling would it be for those early Christians to hear Jesus commend a Roman centurion for his faith? How surprising would it be to hear that Jesus himself was amazed by the faith of this foreign soldier? How surprising would it be to learn a lesson about faith from someone who you didn't possibly think could teach you?**

**Little Burke Matthew is going to be baptized this morning and we are going to learn about faith from him. You might be surprised to hear me say that, because little Burke is at the stage of development where he is just learning how to hold his head up. He's only three months old – how can he have faith? In some Christian traditions, a baby cannot be baptized for that exact reason – he cannot speak for himself. How can he possibly profess his faith?**

**But it's not Burke's faith or lack of it that is the issue this morning. It's not about what Burke can do. It's about what God does. Because in a few minutes, God is going to put God's claim on little Burke Matthew. I am talking about God's faith. God's love. God's welcome. God's unfailing mercy. God's eternal, undying promise of life. I'm going to ask Burke to profess his faith and all of us gathered here are going to answer for him. This morning, Burke is going to teach this congregation what faith looks like.**

**Burke is not the only child who is teaching the adults in this congregation. Two weeks ago Jace, age 7, read the lessons and taught us God's own Word in the scriptures. A few weeks ago, Aster, age 5, invited her friends Meri and Josey to come to Wednesday school to come learn about Jesus. That's evangelism; and the children are leading the way. The children who are here this morning in worship with their parents and grandparents are teaching us how to see God's glory through their eyes. They are asking questions and drawing pictures and maybe even standing on the pew so that they can see better. They are**

**exploring the space and getting comfortable in it. Sometimes they are laughing and sometimes they are crying. They are teaching us adults to be patient with them. They are teaching us what Jesus really meant when he said, “Let the children come to me and do not stop them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (Luke 18:16)**

**In just a few minutes, we are going to welcome little Burke into this body of Christ that we call the church. We are going to witness Burke die to sin and be born again as he is washed in the water of baptism. We are going to watch God claim him as God’s own child. He will become our brother in Christ, the newest member of God’s community. We are all going to make promises. Hannah and Jason, you are going to promise to raise Burke in the faith with the help of your parents and sponsors. And we, this gathered congregation, we are going to promise to help you, by welcoming him to worship, by giving him a Bible, and later on by having Wednesday School and confirmation and mission trips and youth group.**

**Burke, and every child of God, will always be welcome here. Burke, and every child of God, will always have a place here. We make these promises so that Burke, and every child of God, young or old, will grow and learn that God loves them, no matter what.**

**A centurion whose faith amazes even Jesus. Nearly a century of faithfulness in the generations of this congregation. We are part of God’s story that goes back centuries and will continue in the centuries to come. We are members of God’s own family and God’s love for each one will never fail.**

**And I can’t wait to find out what Burke will teach us as he grows in faith.**