

Trinity 21 (2023)

There is something exciting about seeing a baby grow and develop. A pivotal moment for many parents is baby's first step. Often the date is recorded in a book.

And, as time goes along, those steps become more confident. Progress is made.

Then comes full-fledge walking and running. At this point, there is no holding that little one back.

There are likewise increments with faith. People often pass from one level to another, and that is what we see happening in today's Gospel.

A nobleman, probably a royal official from the court of Herod Antipas, travels from Capernaum to Cana seeking Jesus. He wants him to come and heal his son who is at the point of death.

Cana, as you probably remember, was the place Jesus performed His first miracle. It was there He changed water into wine at a marriage feast.

Now, He is back in this village, and it is here the royal official comes seeking Him.

As I have already suggested and as we are going to see, there is a progression in this man's faith. He moves from one tier to another.

Anglican writer Frank Colquhoun calls this royal official's story "a pilgrim's progress." Let's see what he means.

First, as the story begins, there is **faith in Christ's power**.

If this royal official had not believed in Jesus' power, he would not have made the 20 or so mile journey to Cana. By doing so, he exhibited faith.

Even so, his faith at this point was like a baby's first step. It had a way to go. It needed to develop and mature. There was something lacking.

We learn as much from Jesus' initial words to this official (which were also directed more generally at those Galileans gathered around that day). Jesus said:

**“Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.”**

In light of what Jesus says here, it seems certain that this man, along with many others in that region, were looking at Him as nothing more than a wonder-worker, a traveling medicine man with healing powers.

Jesus' words here were both a rebuke and a challenge. To this royal official He was saying:

**“Come up higher. Recognize me for who I am, God’s Anointed, the great I AM of the Hebrew scriptures.**

Did the man take Jesus’ challenge?

Yes, he seems to have. At least he did not turn around and go home. He just kept crying out asking Jesus to come to where his sick boy was and to heal him.

At this point, I want to suggest he was moving from faith in Christ’s power to faith in Christ’s presence.

At this point, everything hinged on Jesus coming to where the boy was . . . on His physical presence at the bed of the sick.

In this way he differs significantly from the centurion spoken of in Matthew’s Gospel and Luke’s Gospel.

The centurion, a Gentile, believed Jesus could heal as it were long distance.

**“Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed,”** he tells Jesus.

The royal official was not yet at that place, but he is moving in that direction. What brought him to that place were Jesus’ words: **“Go your way, your son lives.”**

At this point, the ball was in his court. He had to decide. Was Jesus trustworthy or not? He had to believe or disbelieve. He chose to believe Jesus’ word, and that made all the difference in his life.

The same is true for us. Believing Jesus’ word is where true faith blossoms and comes to life, where all is changed and made new.

The writer of Hebrews says: **“Without faith it is impossible to please God”** (11:16).

At that moment, this man found he had that faith, that faith that pleases God. Do you? What is your faith level this morning?

His faith was confirmed before he arrived home. A servant came out to tell him that his son was alive and doing well.

When he asked the servant, when the boy began to get better, he was told the ninth hour (that is 3 p.m.) – the exact time Jesus had said, “Your son lives.”

He believed. The progression continued.

The story ends with his whole family believing and becoming followers of Jesus.

What might you and I take away from the story of the royal official?

First, it is what I have been saying all along, faith is a growing thing. In this respect, it is like

a green plant. As we take Jesus at His word, our faith matures and increases.

One of the tools we have at our disposal for fostering growth is Trinity-tide, the season of the church year that is now quickly drawing to an end.

In Trinity, our scripture readings connect us with Jesus' words and work during His earthly ministry.

These accounts challenge us to believe more firmly. Baby steps turn into big folk's steps.

**“Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,”** says Paul in Romans 10:17.

Faith is increased by being in regular attendance on Sunday and by paying attention to the scriptures read.

Of course, our contact with scripture should not end with what we hear on Sundays. Every Churchman should follow some plan of reading the Bible daily. The lectionary in the Prayer Book is one place to begin.

So, the first ‘take away’ from today’s Gospel is: **growth in faith is normative and must be pursued.**

A second concerns the person who is just veering toward faith. We might call this one the earnest enquirer. Such a one might want to pray:

**“Lord, there are many things in the Bible I don’t understand. There are many things about you and your teachings I am still trying to get my head round.**

**“Nevertheless, I hear your call to come. Like the royal official, I believe your word.**



**“Open my eyes as you did Elisha’s servant of old. Open them so I may see more clearly. Increase my faith.”**

Will the Son of God honor such a prayer. ///  
Yes! We have Jesus’ own promise: **“Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out”**  
(John 6:37).

The final and third ‘takeaway’ concerns what the royal official did *after* he got home. As we have already seen, he evangelized his household.

Sharing what we know about Jesus is what comes after we say, “I believe.” That sharing can take place anywhere.

I remember hearing the late Bishop Edward Salmon of South Carolina tell the story of something that happened to him on a plane.

After the plane had taken off and the seatbelt signs had gone off, a little girl left her mother and came and sat down in the vacant seat beside him.

The first words out of her mouth were: **“Tell me what you know about Jesus, and I will tell me what I know about Him.”**

As I remember the story, the good bishop and the little girl had a lovely and lively conversation.

More than that, those seated around them found themselves overhearing the Gospel.

Well, this is what true evangelism looks like on the ground . . . or in this case in the air. It can take place almost anywhere.

But what happens if we don't do this, if we remain mute?

I will tell you. Another dark age is likely to emerge. All that it takes for this to happen is for one generation not to passed on the Gospel.

And that is what has been happening in Europe and Britain over the past 50 years. Beautiful buildings remain, but most people who walk past them have lost this part of their heritage. They are without Christ and without hope in the world. They need the Gospel.

Now we see the same trend in our own land. According to a 2021 study conducted by the Pew Research Center, about three-in-ten adults in the US are religious “nones” – people who describe themselves as “nothing in particular” in terms of their religious identity.

We have a lot of catching up to do.

The royal official in today’s Gospel points the way forward. He not only believed himself but shared his belief . . . brought others with him

into the Kingdom, beginning with his own family.

‘From faith to faith’ might be the title of this royal official’s story. May it be ours as well.