



Say The Word

by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone

Luke 7:1-7

After [Jesus] had ended all his sayings in the hearing of the people he entered Capernaum. Now a centurion had a slave who was dear to him, who was sick and at the point of death. When [the centurion] heard of Jesus, he sent to [Jesus] elders of the Jews, asking [Jesus] to come and heal his slave.

And when [the elders of the Jews] came to Jesus, they besought him earnestly, saying, "[The centurion] is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he built us our synagogue." And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to [Jesus], saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed."

We know that for at least a portion of his adult life Jesus lived in the town of Capernaum [see Matthew 4:13]. He lived there long enough to have his own home [see Mark 2:1]. He was a member of the local synagogue; the scriptures tell us that he was accustomed to teaching in the synagogue [see Mark 1:21].

Now, all the years he lived there, worked there, and worshipped there; as far as all the other citizens of Capernaum were concerned, Jesus was no one special. He was just another anonymous man in the crowd, just another carpenter, just another neighbor, just another nice man whom they saw around town.

Then, one day, he went away. You know where he went. He went down to the Jordan River. He got baptized. He was swept off to the wilderness, and after spending forty days in the wilderness, he emerged from that wilderness a changed man.

You know what he did after that. He went out and called a few men to be his disciples. He took them with him as he went around the area preaching and teaching, healing and performing miracles.

He started drawing big crowds. He started telling people all sorts of good news. He started making a big splash in the towns around the Sea of Galilee. Over night, this carpenter from Capernaum, this fellow that nobody had paid any attention to before, became a local celebrity.

After gaining a measure of fame in the surrounding towns and villages, Jesus made a trip back to Capernaum, back to his home town. This time when he was headed back home, his new reputation preceded him. This time even the rich and the powerful new that he was on his way home. The society ladies swooned with excitement. The idle young rogues were energized.

One man in particular was quite interested in Jesus' imminent return. He was one of the richest and most powerful men in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was on the way home, this man's ears perked up. He was the local Centurion.

He was the commander of the Roman legion garrisoned in the town. He was a powerful man, a wealthy man, and a generous man. Although he was a Roman, he gave the money to build the synagogue -

- the very place where Jesus used to go to worship God,
- the same place where Jesus used to stand up and read the holy scriptures,
- the actual place where Jesus used to teach the first century equivalent of Sunday School!

There's nothing to suggest that Jesus and the Centurion knew each other. But, before he went away, you can be sure that Jesus knew who the Centurion was. And when Jesus was on his way back, the Centurion knew who Jesus was, too.

The Centurion had heard all about Jesus. He heard Jesus was a man of God. He heard Jesus was a miracle-worker. He heard Jesus could heal the sick. The centurion had heard it all, and he believed that Jesus could help him out. The Centurion did not want to go to Jesus, himself.

He did not want to go up to Jesus in public, himself.

He did not want to ask Jesus for a favor, himself.

So, he went to his friends, the Elders of the synagogue, fellows who probably knew Jesus before, and asked them to do him a favor. He wanted them to ask Jesus to heal one of his sick slaves.

The Elders took to the road. They found Jesus outside of town. They asked him for the favor. Jesus said, "I'll do it right now." Straightway, he headed off in the direction of the Centurion's home.

When the centurion heard that Jesus was on the way, he immediately sent his friends out to intercept Jesus. "Don't trouble yourself to come all the way here," was the message the Centurion sent to Jesus. "I'm not worthy to have you in my home."

Then, the Centurion's message went one step beyond: "Just say the word," the Centurion added, "and my servant will be healed."

"Say the word," he said, and

- he believed there was power in Jesus' word;
- he believed there was healing in Jesus' word;
- he believed there was a miracle in Jesus' word.

The centurion had heard and had come to believe that when Jesus spoke, there was power in his word.

Do you believe it?

Even today, the right word is powerful. The true word can heal. The wise word can be miracle-making.

Jesus is not here to say the word, but he left somebody who can speak for him. He left you. The words he spoke to his disciples are also intended for you.

Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." [John 20:21b]

Jesus said, "In my name you will cast out demons; you will speak in new tongues... you will lay your hands on the sick, and they will recover." [Mark 16:17-18]

Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses... to the end of the earth." [Acts 1:8]

In this weary and war-torn world, in this time where hate abounds and killing is lauded, in this era when old prejudices and fears erupt in violence - somebody needs to speak for Jesus.

Somebody needs to say the word that brings peace and justice,
the word that draws warring camps together in brotherhood,
the word that heals the hurts and bridges the chasms.
Somebody needs to say the powerful word that makes miracles happen.

The only somebody left to say the word is you.
Say the word, and maybe your word will bring a reconciliation.

You've been in tense situations. Tempers flare and abrasive words are exchanged - hurtful words, careless words, cruel words. There you are in the aftermath, when the silence is strained, when an awkwardness presses down, when you're afraid to glance at your partner.

You remember the words you spoke, the cutting words, the slashing words. And there in the aftermath, you see the damage you did.

There in the aftermath, suspended there in your throat, dangling between passion and compassion, hanging there between reason and pride - are the very words you need to speak. They wait their time, those words that can start the rebuilding of your loving relationship.

There's only one person on this earth who can say the words. That one person is you. You can do it.

Say the words, "I'm sorry," and a miracle of reconciliation can begin.

Say the words, "I was wrong," and the hurts will begin to heal.

Say the words, "I made a mistake," and the torn heart will start to mend.

Jesus won't say those words for you. The Elders of the church won't run down the street and do you a favor. Only you can speak for yourself.

Say the word, and maybe your word will displace fear.

When I was a little boy, my mother was very strict. She didn't let me run around the neighborhood and play. Even though we lived a mere five minute walk from the business section of town, she didn't let me go down to Woolworth's and look at the toys. She didn't let me go to the movies by myself. She didn't even let me go off to day-dream in the cemetery at the end of the block. She didn't let me out of her sight.

What was a boy to do? I begged, and I pleaded, and I nagged my mother to let me go off to the movies alone. Finally, my relentless nagging wore her resistance down. She agreed to let me go to the Varsity Theater to see "The Ten Commandments" all by myself.

I was ecstatic with my over-due freedom. Years before Alan Shepherd said it from the moon, I knew it was true as I walked the pavement along Court Street that fateful night so many years ago, this may have been only one small step for mankind, but it was a giant leap for Jerry McGlone!

It was after the movie that the joy in my newly won freedom turned to fear. Surely that night was the darkest night in recorded history. No moon. No stars. Even the street lamps failed to illuminate that caliginous night and my long solitary walk home.

Even though I had just seen a movie about Moses and the miraculous powers of God Almighty, I also knew what was lurking out there in the dark night!

I knew: every shadow hid a menacing monster. Every breeze was some murderer's sour breath scraping across the back of my neck. Every sound was some robber's footsteps creeping up on me from behind.

By the time I had climbed to the top of the hill and reached the high school, I was trembling with dread. I just knew that crazy man who lived behind the school, the one we called Bob White because that was what he always whistled; I just knew he was going to jump out from behind the bushes and drag me off to his lair where he would perform unimaginable acts of violence on my young and tender body.

And it was just about then,

- when my heart was pounding in my throat,

- when the tears were welling up in my eyes,

- when I cursed my stupid plea for freedom,

- when I wanted nothing more in the world

than

to be safe at home -

- just then,

- I saw a cloaked figure materialize out of the inky blackness of the night, and that frightful apparition was trudging purposefully right toward me.

That was it. I knew I was in for trouble. I figured I was a goner. I whispered one last pleading prayer to God. I muttered a quick apology to my mother for everything I had ever done wrong. I stopped dead in my tracks. I stood there, my body shaking with fear. I just stood there, awaiting my deserved fate.

And through the darkness, while she was still far off, I heard my mother's voice. "I thought I'd come and walk the rest of the way home with you tonight," she said. And with her word, all my fears vanished.

Somebody you know is afraid right now. Somebody you know feels bewildered and alone. Somebody you know is lost in the dark. Who is going to speak to him? Who is going to calm her down?

Say the words, "I thought I come and walk with you a while." And your word can bring comfort.

Say the words, "Don't worry, you're safe with me." And your word can bring assurance.

Say the words, "I'll stay a while with you." And your word can release the fears.

You, my friends, have the power to wipe away somebody's fears with your loving word. Don't wait any longer. Say the word.

Say the word, and maybe your word will bring healing.

The people around the Sea of Galilee and all up and down the Jordan River Valley from Capernaum to Jerusalem never forgot the words he said.

That paralytic they lowered through the roof on his bed, heard Jesus say, "Take heart, my son, your sins are forgiven... Rise, take up your bed and go home." [Matthew 9:2,6] And he got up and walked home.

The woman who had suffered for twelve years with a chronic hemorrhage, the one who crawled up behind him and reached out her trembling hand just to touch the fringe of his garment, she remembered the words Jesus said to her, "Take heart, daughter, your faith has made you well." [Matthew 9:22] Because in an instant she was cured.

They were the sweetest words she had ever heard, that woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery, that woman who deserved to be stoned to death for her actions. Instead of heavy rocks being hurled in her direction, Jesus spoke to her the sweetest words she ever heard. "Neither do I condemn you." Jesus said, "go, and do not sin again." [John 8:11] And she walked off with her head held high, off with a brand new second chance, off to begin a brand new life.

The thief on the cross drew his last breath on this side of eternity with these triumphant words ringing in his ears, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." [Luke 23:43]

Jesus spoke words that healed, words of promise, words that brought second chances and hope for tomorrow. His words changed lives.

Now it's up to you to speak those words. You can change somebody's life when you say -

- words of hope and assurance,
- words of grace and pardon,
- words of healing and love.

What's holding you back? Say the word.

Say the word, and maybe your word can be a witness to your faith.

A man came out of his house on his way to church one Sunday morning. Across the yard, his neighbor was loading golf clubs into his car. The neighbor yelled, "Hey buddy, do you want to play a round with me this morning?"

"Oh, no, I can't this morning. I've got to get to church," was his reply.

After a moment of silence, the golfer said, “You know, this is the seventh time I’ve invited you to play golf with me, but you have never once invited me to go to church with you.”

Say the word.

Somebody needs your witness.

Somebody’s waiting for your invitation.

Somebody needs to hear about God’s great love -
- from you!

“Say the word, and my servant will be healed,” the Centurion said. He believed in the power of the word.

Do you?

Your word can work a miracle in somebody’s life today.