

## Worship on May 30, 2010

Welcome

Musical Call to Worship

Songs of Survival

Talking with Children

MJ (assisted by David) introduces survival idea (lifejackets) and the Theologian in Residence

Recognition of 56 Years of Service – Del Woodward

Praying

Scripture Luke 7:1-10 ~ May 30

MJ <sup>1</sup>Jesus shared all these sayings with the crowd that day on the plain. When he was finished, he went into the town of Capernaum. <sup>2</sup>There, a Centurion had a slave he loved dearly. The slave was sick – about to die – <sup>3</sup>so when the Centurion heard about Jesus, he contacted some Jewish elders. He sent them to ask Jesus to come and heal his dear slave. <sup>4</sup>With great emotion and respect, the elders presented their request to Jesus.

DD **Elders** This man is worthy of your help. *It's true that he's a Centurion,* <sup>5</sup>but he loved our nation. In fact, he paid for our synagogue to be built.

MJ <sup>6</sup>So Jesus accompanied them. When they approached the Centurion's home, the Centurion sent out some friends to bring a message to Jesus.

DD **Messengers** Lord, don't go to the trouble of coming inside. I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. <sup>7</sup>That's why I sent others with my request. Just say the word, and that will be enough to heal my servant. <sup>8</sup>I understand how authority works, being under authority myself and having soldiers under my authority. I command to one, "Go," and he goes. I say to

another, “Come,” and he comes. I say to my slave, “Do this,” and he obeys me.

**MJ** <sup>9</sup>Jesus was deeply impressed when he heard this. He turned to the crowd that followed him.

**Jesus** Listen everyone. *This outsider, this Roman,* has more faith than I have found even among our own Jewish people.

<sup>10</sup>The friends of the Centurion returned home, and they found the slave was completely healed.

**MJ** That’s a great story to start us off on our summer survival series, getting, as it does right down to life and death. This summer I have asked David Digby, our Theologian in Residence, to share in a variety of ways in worship to do what theologians do: think about God’s work and way, to ask questions and help us think. This whole summer we’re going to take up the idea of deep survival: who lives, who dies, and why.

**DD** That’s right, Mary Jane. I can hardly wait for us to get into this series. Following Jesus is, for sure, ways we behave all the time. But it’s also ways we think all the time and when we behave and think in Jesus-like ways we have a good chance of surviving all kinds of perils.

**MJ** The church has always been about staying alive – physically in our bodies and also spiritually in our spirits and also in the relationships which make us healthy. We think there are differences that we can make so the chances of staying alive through a storm or crisis are improved.

**DD** If things unfold as we hope every one of us will have some survival tactic in our minds to carry with us – some idea or insight that, at some point, might mean the difference between life and death.

**MJ** Scripture does say, “The last enemy, the last enemy to be put underfoot...”

**DD** is death.

- MJ** We are about life. Life abundant, overflowing, joyously free, given up for God
- DD** so God can use us – any time – anywhere.
- MJ** That’s surviving and thriving. And that’s what we want for each of us. None of us know when we’ll be plunged into some deep survival situation: an accident, an explosion, an illness – or any of hundreds of changes that will forever alter life as we have known it. Here, this Memorial Day weekend when the whole nation goes to the cemetery and stops to remember, to offer a prayer and to think about living and dying, it’s a good time to think about living and dying.
- DD** We think there are things we can do and believe that improve our chances of getting through, as Christ strengthens us, so we are never beat down, so we endure when others may falter, so God is glorified even in the tribulations that, sooner or later, we all have to face in one way or another.
- MJ** David, how did you get interested in thinking about survival. Of course, we all want to live and not die but we don’t all go buying books about it and making a study of survival as a concept.
- DD** Well, I love to go sailing but sailing always scares me a little. So many things can happen and the winds and waves can become overpowering very quickly. In a sailboat you’re at the mercy of forces far greater than yourself. It’s great fun but there is also risk and the need to make intelligent decisions. So sailing got me to worrying about survival. But the thing that set it off was a National Park Service Ranger, as we hiked through some pretty rugged woods in the dark of night, last November, in the wilderness around the Buffalo River, looking for my friend who had been wandering out there alone, afraid, cold, tired, and lost for the past seven hours. The Ranger recommended a book to me, which I bought and read, about learning to think and prepare in ways that help keep us out of danger and away from death.

- MJ** Come on, tell us the story. You didn't start at the beginning. What led up to doing your Search and Rescue with the Ranger?
- DD** Meg and I took our canoe, the one out behind the parsonage garage, down to Arkansas where we met up with a couple of old floating buddies from Oklahoma and Texas for a couple of days floating on the river. We knew the water was up and that the weather was cold, but adventure was in the air and we'd (except for Meg who had the good sense to stay in the RV and volunteered to cook a feast for us when we came off the river) floated the Buffalo and were counselors for the church float trips with high school kids some 30+ years ago.
- MJ** Okay, you're out on the river, alone since most people have more sense than going canoeing when it's cold already and something happened.
- DD** It wasn't such a big deal, at the time. Bill turned over first and got chilled. No great worry, we fished all his gear out of the river and got him dried off, more or less, and went on with renewed caution. Then Johnny and I got sideways over two boulders and couldn't get the canoe free. That water went rushing over so hard that the canoe instantly filled up. The weight of the water ground it down against those boulders. The bottom was rough with huge slick rocks so it was very difficult to walk through the waist-deep water that seemed determined to knock us down and sweep us away. We couldn't get the canoe free, no matter what we tried. Bill had some hyperthermia going and Johnny's bad back was hurting and we couldn't get all three of us in Bill's canoe on that river so we made a plan. Johnny, who swears to this day that he will never get in a canoe again, was supposed to walk back upriver to a camping area we'd seen. Bill and I would take the remaining canoe down to where we were to meet our pickup guy to take up back up off the river to civilization, to Meg waiting with supper in the RV. Bill and I made it. Johnny didn't.
- MJ** What happened to Johnny?

- DD** The terrain was too rough so he climbed to the top of the ridges to try to see where he was. But he got lost and wandered for hours in a big circle. That's how the Ranger and I found him, less than 100 yards from the canoe still being held hostage by the river. He was very very grateful to be rescued. He says he'll never think of salvation without remembering the feeling of hearing us call his name. He was too scared in the dark to try to walk any more and actually had to go to him and lift him up and give him food before we could hike back.
- MJ** It's a good thing your story has a happy ending. What lessons did you learn?
- DD** It's a little like that Centurion in our story who had to give up his power and competence and admit he couldn't take care of his slave. Bill and I had to give up our belief in our own skills and admit we were in over our heads and ask for help. Asking for help means giving up control. The Rangers take over and follow procedures. All we could do was follow behind and do what we were told... go here, wait there, take this, leave that.
- MJ** The Centurion understood authority very well. He was the one who usually gave orders, not took them. But here he had the good sense to admit he didn't have enough authority in this situation and to think outside the box – how many Roman officers turned to Jesus for help? – to get what he needed. His devotion to his slave was more important than his pride.
- DD** That's survival thinking. False pride can get you dead. Many people die out on simple day hikes, believing that they'll only be gone a couple of hours, not taking survival equipment, and when they get lost, they panic and wander in circles, wasting energy and making it worse. Then exposure and thirst combine with cold in the night and they perish. Pride makes us underestimate the danger and overestimate our abilities. Humility in nature as well as humility in life is a survival tactic. When we believe that we are in charge, we are masters of our environment, we put ourselves at risk. Jesus was amazed at the Centurion's faith and his willingness to ask for help, even of a foreigner of a different religion and culture.

- MJ** You heard it here: deep survival in dangerous times means being willing to ask for help, means giving up control to others who know more and following instructions. That works when it's drastic change and we have to reinvent ourselves – coping with a death, facing a loss of health, adjusting to losing a job, .....
- DD** When we name Jesus as our savior we are admitting that he knows more than we do about living and that he can lead us through whatever wilderness we are in and sing, Jesus calls o'er the tumult of our life's wild, restless sea saying, 'Christian, follow me.'