

Deserving
By Rev Todd Farnsworth
Luke 7: 1-10

I Deserve a



DONUT

When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. 2 There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. 3 The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. 4 When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, 5 because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." 6 So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. 7 That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 8 For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." 9 When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." 10 Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

Whenever you see a word pop up a couple of times in a lesson from the Bible, lo, it should be a sign unto you to pay attention to it. I believe that in today's text from the narrative lectionary, the word "deserve" is the one to watch. Some translators have it as "worthy". So be it. You get the gist. In both cases the word is used to explain why Jesus should or shouldn't respond to the concerns of an individual. In the first instance we read: *When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man*

deserves to have you do this, 5 because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.”

Deserving is predicated upon the love of nation and commitment to the local synagogue. The worthiness of the individual/centurion is defined by his values aligning with those who are making the request to Jesus. He's like us, he supports us, please help him. It's the prayer that the fans of the Buccaneers and the Chiefs are lifting to God today. Be with our quarterback, he's gotten us this far, he deserves to win! And of course, we all know, Brady the GOAT should win...he's had a rough year what with changing teams and climates, he deserves the win, but I digress. That's a silly example of worthiness. I'm sure that in Kansas, the fans are equally grateful to Mahomes, the young upstart who can do it *all*? We'll see.

The second use of “deserve” occurs when the centurion sends his friends ahead to meet Jesus. The centurion doesn't want to get Jesus in trouble with religious purity laws. Entering the house of a Roman centurion would have been a big “no no” for a rabbi, and the officer doesn't believe himself that important to warrant Jesus' tarnishing his reputation. The centurion notes (through his intercessors) *“Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. 7 That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.* Despite his status, the centurion doesn't feel worthy of Jesus' attention, but he hopes for it anyway.

That word, “deserve” is a tricky one. It can highlight our perceived greatness or humility depending on how it is used. In either case, it is the reason given for Jesus/God to take action on someone's behalf.

I want to show you some pictures.



**IT IS BETTER TO
DESERVE WITHOUT
RECEIVING, THAN TO
RECEIVE WITHOUT
DESERVING.**



Robert Green Ingersoll
American Political leader
1833 - 1899

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No matter how qualified or
deserving we are, we will never
reach a better life until we can
imagine it for ourselves and allow
ourselves to have it.

— *Richard Bach* —

AZ QUOTES

**THE MOMENT
THAT YOU START
TO WONDER IF
YOU DESERVE
BETTER,
YOU DO.**

KUSHANDWIZDOM

What you think you deserve
is what you are getting in life.

~Roxana Jones



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Girl

You deserve more than
what you're settling for.
Please remember to put
yourself first.

These examples echo the ways in which “deserve” or “worthy” are used in church parlance today. Much like in the first century, there is a belief that a case has to be made for commending ourselves or someone else to God’s care.

I remember when we were starting our food shelf in VT. One of the big concerns that kept coming up among the members was that we would be helping “deserving” individuals or families. You’ve probably heard a similar story or participated in it. There was a real need on the church’s part that we didn’t squander our resources on people who were unworthy to receive a week’s worth of food. Fortunately, we had an older minister helping us with the establishing of the food shelf, and he asked the folks involved if any of them had bird feeders. Heads nodded all around and there were a few stories about suet vs peanut butter and how best to hang one’s bird feeder.

The minister asked about that concern. He said, “Is there anything you can do to keep the squirrels from getting at your feeder?” And there were stories of greased poles and Rube Goldberg contraptions that had ultimately failed to keep the squirrels at bay. Everyone concluded that despite their best efforts the squirrels always won!

The minister asked, “Then why do you do it? Why do you bother? If you know the squirrels are going to get in why do you put out food?”

The minister let that sit for a moment and said, “I guess that if you want to feed the birds, you’ve gotta expect a few squirrels.”

Feeding the birds or the squirrels has nothing to do with worthiness. It is an act of caring for those who are in need. There is no judgment on our part that can really stop the help from coming. Jesus is on his way. And yet, we get worked up from time to time about who is deserving. We withhold our gifts in fear that someone we don't intend to help might benefit.

Isn't it still help?

"I guess that if you want to feed the birds, you've gotta expect a few squirrels."

Jesus makes clear in today's story that the healing he brings has nothing to do with "deserving." Jesus says, *"I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel."* **10** *Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.*

Jesus doesn't check this centurion's scorecard. Jesus doesn't take the crowds word for it. He acts out of concern. Jesus acts out of love. We experience that love each time we come to this table. Worthy. Unworthy. Jesus meets us with love.

I've got one more picture for you.



Let's believe in love and act towards the needs of God's people with love.
It's the thing that ultimately wins the day. Amen.