

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jul 1st 2017

All of today's readings deal with faith in some way. In the first reading Sarah does not really have faith, although she should. In the gospel the soldier has complete and unquestioning faith. Even in the psalm reading, the psalm is the magnificat. This is the song of Mary's faith and acceptance of her role.

Either Abraham knew there was something special about his guests, or he was just a naturally good host, but his hospitality was rewarded – if you can call a baby in your old age a reward. But he is promised a son in his old age, and his wife laughs. She knows there is no way that is going to happen – she is way too old to get pregnant. But it does happen. Her lack of faith is not so much distrust or suspicion as an awareness of natural laws. Women don't get pregnant after menopause and here is someone telling her she's going to have a baby when she knows that is not physically possible. But the Lord says anything and everything is possible, including an old age baby. And there he is.

Abraham had faith and trust and put in a little work to make the good things happen. He trusted in the Lord and had faith. Sarah laughed at the prophecy, but she was nursing a baby the next year.

The centurion in the gospel has tremendous faith. He has a sick servant and he knows that Jesus can heal people, so he asks Jesus to heal the man. Jesus says he will come right over, but the centurion has faith. The man says, oh, no don't do that. I'm not worthy to welcome you. I know if you say the word it will be done. But he, like Sarah, is not only acting on faith. This man understands hierarchy.

He knows that if he tells his men to do something they will obey without question. He knows that Jesus is a powerful man. His word is sufficient. He knows that if Jesus says the word, the man will be healed, however far away. His faith is not on the miracle, but on his faith in the system. He knows how it works – he obeys orders from his superiors and his men obey his orders and the work gets done.

Why should things be any different with Jesus, an even more important man? And Sarah's distrust is not really the distrust of the miracle, but likewise, her understanding of the system of things. She knows good and well that she cannot get pregnant: Until she does by the miracle.

Abraham is hospitable to God and his hospitality is rewarded by a miracle. The centurion has such total faith in Jesus that he doesn't even need the touch, he knows, like in his army, that the word is sufficient.

Let's try to be less like Sarah, laughing at the idea of a miracle, and more like Abraham and the centurion whose faith is strong and accepting of whatever miracle might come our way.

Tamora Whitney-Creighton University's English Department