*If the Lord had not been on our side, let Israel say,* *if the Lord had not been on our side, when our enemies attacked us, then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us; then the flood would have swept us away; the torrent would have gone over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters. Blessed be the Lord, who has not given us as prey to their teeth. We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the hunters; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*  Psalm 124

*When the two days were over, He went from that place to Galilee (for Jesus Himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in the prophet’s own country). When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed Him, since they had seen all that He had done in Jerusalem at the festival, for they, too, had gone to the festival. Then He came again to Cana in Galilee, where He had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Then Jesus said to him: “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” The official said to Him: “Sir, come down before my little boy dies.” Jesus said to him: “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him: “Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.” The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him: “Your son will live.” So, he himself believed, along with his whole household.* *Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.* John 4:43-54

*Ariana came with her missionary parents to visit family in the United States. During their stateside assignment away from Brazil, someone asked Ariana if she wanted to be a missionary when she grew up. The 5-year-old stated, “I’m a missionary now. I want to be something else when I grow up!”*

I Believe, I Believe…

1. Disappointed, because she did not get a Christmas gift she was hoping for, but prompted by her mom, Suzanna, in the *“Miracle on 34th St.”* quietly whispers: *“I believe, I believe…”* Her words and the scene from the movie came to me while working on this message as I read the words that followed the royal official’s from Capernaum plea to Jesus, to heal his dying son. Our text says: *“The man took Jesus at His word and departed.”* Can you imagine this moment? His son, bedridden is actively dying, and this father, in search for help approaches Jesus, but instead on insisting on Jesus going with him to Capernaum, he takes Jesus at His word and returns home. A seemingly an incredible reaction of a man who travels far, searching for help for his dying son, and, upon finding the person who could heal him, leaves just with the words of promise. An incredible story, not necessarily because we eventually learn that the miracle of healing takes place, but because this man, whose name we do not even know, remains today as one of the giants of faith, one of those people who took God’s words for granted, and who followed God’s commands without hesitation.



2. As Christians, as the Church, every day we face tasks which we must take on, and with every one of them we need to turn to God for guidance as how to fulfill our responsibilities. We need God’s wisdom in whatever lies ahead, otherwise we are bound to fail in the long run. Even when we try to discern God’s guidance, we make mistakes in life, but when we keep God out of the equation, we certainly will fail. I also know that even when we pray we sometimes wonder if God will respond to our prayers. We wonder whether God hears our prayer, and if God’s response does not come immediately, we try to rationalize this by saying that God knows better what our needs are, and that He will respond in a due time. The doubt, however, seem to encroach upon us. The father in this story faces the same dilemma. First, he goes to someone he does not even know, all he heard about Him is that he helped other people. Then, when he sees the man who apparently has the ability to help his son, the response he receives is like a cold shower: *“Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders,* *you will never believe.”*

3. As we read his story we might be puzzled by this man’s faith. Did he believe Jesus, or did he just give up, realizing that this Jesus, this man he approached, is just an ordinary man, not some *“world renown physician?”* He seems not to give up, even though the first response indicates Jesus’ indifference. He does not perceive this interaction as a *“waste of time,”* but makes one more attempt: *“Sir, come down before my child dies.”*His reaction and his words indicate faith.He loves his child and will not give up easily, although I believe he might have been developing some sort of doubt, and in reality, our sometimes doubts, even if we do not like to admit this. Later on, as we continue our story, John writes: *“Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and all his household believed.”*These words indicate to me that despite his reaction, there was some doubt deep down in this man’s heart. I also believe that Jesus, who *“knew the heart of every man,”* saw this official’s disbelief at first, and Jesus’ response to that man was a lesson to him and subsequently to us: *“Believe in me, even if you have doubts.”* In the end this man’s faith prevailed, and *“he and his household believed.”*

4. In some ways this official’s words remind me of the words of Martha who said to Jesus, after Lazarus’ death: *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would have not died.”* You see, somehow they both believed that the mere presence of Jesus would perform the miracle of healing. They both had to learn, that there is more to faith than being assured of Jesus’ physical presence. The words of Jesus to Thomas: *“...blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed,”* powerfully come alive here. We know that Jesus is present in our lives, but we still pray asking for His presence in our lives, as a form of the assurance we need. The Scriptures promise us that our prayers are considered by God, yet, when we do not receive theresponse the way we would like to, the doubt seeps into our hearts. Do you remember the joke I shared with you of an old lady who heard the sermon on faith moving the mountains? *“After she went home, she asked God to move the mountain separating her from the village. In the morning she went to the window only to see the mountain still there, and shaking her head she said: I knew this would not happen.”*

5. Asking for help for his son, this father has put aside his pride, his knowledge, his position, and he asked Jesus to help his child. He believes that Jesus is able to heal him and even when Jesus seems to be reluctant and maybe even refusing to help, he does not give up. His faith might be put to the test, but nevertheless his faith grows and strengthens, and in accepting Jesus at His word, he is not giving up. As the story unfolds, he returns home only with Jesus’ promise that his son will live. In the end, as the story reveals, his son is healed. We have Jesus’ promise that He will remain with us to the end of times. We have His assurance that whatever we will ask in His name God will grant us. We have the assurance that Jesus will take care of all our needs. This is what the Bible says. That’s what the Gospel says. All we have to do is to: *“Believe it!”* Just as this royal official did, and just as Suzanna in the *“Miracle on 34th Street”* did. God indeed keeps His promises, and we may rest assured that He is with us and listens to us, answering our prayers.

6. This man returned home finding his son alive and well, but even before he entered his house, even before he saw his son playing, healed and well, he heard from his servants that the child lives. He was not surprised. I believe that at this point he was not even relieved. The relief came when Jesus responded to his request. He was returning home with peace in his heart. Jesus promised and he believed, even if not fully at first. He took Jesus’ word, and his life was changed forever. When we take Jesus’ word seriously, when we believe what He said, we begin to live by His words, and this is the turning point of our life. Do we need the signs that our pleas are being heard by God? Sure, if they come they are welcome, but they are not essential to our faith. We do not need to see miracles to know that Jesus is able to perform them. We do not need the visible signs to trust His words. We do not need to see that he is in our midst. Why not? Because we know it! He promised. All we need is to hold on to His words.

7. Jesus listens to us and He responds to our prayers, but we have to hear His voice and what He tells us as well. This father heard Jesus and when Jesus confronted him saying that he needs signs he did not argue, he did not turn away from Jesus, he simply repeated the request. He believed that Jesus is able to help, and he knew that what Jesus says is the truth. We need to know this as well. We need to trust and to believe that Jesus hears our prayers, but we also must be aware that He knows what our motivations for these requests are. I recently talked with the man who shared with me how he was in love with a girl from the same little town. They were from the same church, they sung together in a *“worship team,”* and he prayed asking God to be able to marry her. She however, as he said: *“did not want me.”* Now, years later he told me: *“God had something better in mind. I eventually got married, have three wonderful children, and we have had wonderful 30+ years together.”* The time of infatuation of a young man has passed, and with it his life was indeed fulfilled by the grace of God.

8. Faith of this father steadily grew to the point that he was able to share his faith with his family and they all were drawn into the sphere of God’s children. When God called us into His circle, when we decided to accept Jesus as our Savior, He also called us to share our faith with others, so they too may learn about Christ and His love. Even if, or when, we do not see the others’ response, and even when we do not understand why, we must not doubt and wonder whether or why He – God, does not respond. In 2 Corinthians 12:8-10 Paul basically said that God told him*: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* Paul knew that the weaknesses we experience give us strength, if and when, we trust Jesus Christ. I believe that this was also the lesson that the father of that dying child learned on that day, and this is the lesson that we all are to remember and to learn if and when necessary.