What amazes you? What are some things that really fill you with wonder and astonishment? I remember dangling 125 feet in the air and looked for the bottom of the tracks just before dashing to 65 mph in the front seat of roller coaster at Great America. Another ride that probably reached 75 mph in about 75 feet and then took you through a couple corkscrew turns and then did it all backwards. That was amazing! It is pretty amazing amazing that people can build such massive structures that send bodies flying one way, stomachs flying another, and still not kill a person.

But just when I started to think that was pretty amazing, I went out on my deck the other night and looked up into the sky. Light years away, twinkling through an expanse so vast it can only be described as the universe, were billions of fine pieces of art formed by the fingers of God. I woke up early the other morning to see the golden rays of God's handy work gleaming through the trees with a warmth and radiance only surpassed by the creator's glory. When I compare man-made amazements to God-made amazements, it does not take long for me to see that the Lord is the master of amazement!

So, do you think there is anything that could amaze the Lord? Better yet, do you think there is anything of ours that could amaze the Lord? Well, if you are trying to amaze him with the biggest coaster you could build, that would not do it. But if you take a look at God's Word today, you may be surprised to learn that you can amaze Jesus! And that is exactly what we want to do this morning - AMAZE JESUS! Amaze him with a humble faith and with a confident faith.

When I asked you before what amazed you, did you think of something massive like I did? Massive amazes us, doesn't it? So maybe that is why when we are talking about such things today we are not surprised when Luke introduces us to a Roman centurion. Here was someone who fit the profile of massive. He had massive power - he had command over 100 men in the most powerful military on earth. He had massive respect - he even had Roman-hating Jewish leaders calling him deserving. He even had massive money - he built the Jews a synagogue out of his own funds.

This massive man had everything! But does that mean that he was as amazed as everybody else was? No! You see, this Roman centurion had heard about Jesus. And he recognized that commanding 100 soldiers is peanuts compared to someone who has 12 legions of angels at his immediate disposal. He realized that building a synagogue is a pretty minor achievement compared to creating everything out of nothing. To this massively amazing man, only Jesus was amazing. So much so, that our text says: The centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him. So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.

Does that sound amazing to you? You did not see a massive man in those words. You saw a minuscule man! You did not see a man with pride. You saw a humble man! And so did Jesus! That is why it was his turn to be amazed at the centurion. Jesus did not see his reliance on someone else as failure, but faith. He did not see his humility as weakness,
but strength. Jesus was amazed with his humble faith.

I personally think that this is an amazing congregation. You talk about massive! We have a massively beautiful church. We have a massively energetic history. We have a massive love for one another. And personally, I believe we have massive potential for the future if we are willing to work hard together. That is amazing to me. But do you want to know how you as a congregation amaze Jesus?

You amaze Jesus when you recognize that merely going to church is not nearly as great an accomplishment as going to the cross. You said as much earlier in service with your words: I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child.

You amaze Jesus by recognizing that a filled offering envelope is not as impressive as a heart filled with God’s forgiveness from which the offering came.

You amaze Jesus when you recognize that the strengthened will it takes to sit through a longer communion service is nothing compared to the strengthened faith you receive through Jesus’ body and blood shed for you.

In other words, you can and do amaze the one who usually amazes you. You amaze Jesus, not with anything massive that you do, but simply with a humble faith.

At some amusement parks, they rate all of their rides on a scale of amazement from 1 – 5. 1 is for the littlest of children. 5 is called an aggressive thrill ride. If you had to rate the centurion on that same scale, how would you rate him? On that scale, wouldn’t you be tempted to give him somewhere near a 1? Humility certainly is not aggressive or thrilling! Certainly no one would call a roller coaster humble. Humility sounds more like it should be reserved for small children and the weak of heart.

But the man is not a roller coaster; he is a centurion. And it is easy to see why. His humility did not make him weak. On the contrary, along with his humility he displayed something else that was amazing - confidence. Listen: But say the word, and my servant will be healed. 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. 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. Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

The Roman centurion had high expectations, didn’t he? Some might say unrealistic expectations. He wanted a miracle. And he got one. And he did not need any magic or any sign from heaven. All he needed was Jesus’ Word. Faith trusts God’s Word. Faith expects results. Faith is confident.

There was a part of midwest that was once experiencing a severe drought. The ground was dry and cracked. By July the crops were thin and spiky. Without timely rainfalls, farmers risked losing their entire harvests. So one Sunday morning the people of a small town decided to hold a special prayer service to pray for rain. The church was packed. The people prayed for hours. And after it was all over, as the members walked out the church doors and looked up into the cloudless blue sky, only one little old lady opened up her umbrella.

Do you have much in common with that little old lady? When you ask God in prayer, do you raise your umbrella because you expect to be showered with more blessings than you can imagine? Or have past disappointments led you to lower your expectations of what you think the Lord can do?
You know what is truly amazing? It is the grace of God. He does not treat us as our sins deserve. He does not send us where we deserve to go. Instead, the Lord says: I love you. I sent my Son to die for you. And because Jesus did for you what you could never do for yourself, I forgive you. That is the promise we first heard at our Baptisms where the Holy Spirit ignited faith.

That is the promise we hear again and again in God’s Word where the Lord fortifies faith. That is the promise we hear in Holy Communion where Jesus gives us his body and blood to forgive our sins and strengthen our faith. And every time we hear that promise, we can have confidence like a centurion who expected a miracle, like a lady who opened her umbrella. That is amazing to Jesus!

Roller coasters cannot. Buildings cannot. Human achievements cannot. So you might be tempted to think that nothing can amaze Jesus. After all, he is God who can do anything. But when Jesus looks at your sinful heart that the Holy Spirit has now turned into a heart of humble, yet confident faith, perhaps he pauses for just a moment and, with a look of satisfaction on his face, he thinks to self: Now that is truly amazing. Amen.

Pastor Keith Bilitz
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Alma City
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Smiths Mill