

Signs and Wonders

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. [Amen].

Our text for today is the Gospel according to John in the fourth chapter:

*Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."*¹

For those of you at the Sunday Morning Bible study, it might sound like Jesus' words here would be better directed at Pharaoh in the context of Israel's exodus than at this royal official. After all, unlike Pharaoh, this man came seeking the Lord. This wasn't the case of God confronting a man with 10 plagues so that he might know that Yahweh is God. This wasn't like in Exodus when God sent Moses down to Egypt to do the signs and wonders before a Pharaoh who not only never asked for them, but ended up never believing because of them anyway. This was a man traveling 20 miles from Capernaum to Cana both believing in Christ and seeking a sign.

And so, when we hear Jesus' words to the royal official,

*"Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."*²

It prompts questions. Why not seek the sign? Why not ask for anything in Jesus' Name and expect the Father to grant it? After all, isn't that what Christ told us to do? Why shouldn't this royal official ask for the miracle of healing for his son? If hard-hearted Pharaoh gets 10 signs, why shouldn't this guy get just one? Why do the sons in Cana get to drink wine at a wedding while the sons in Capernaum die in their beds?

No doubt there are plenty of people in this world who say they'd gladly believe in God if they only got a sign. That's the atheist manifesto, right? *"If there was 'proof' then I'm sure I'd believe it."* And it's not just the pagans who want a sign. For Christians, maybe it's the desire for physical proof of sins forgiven. *"If only I could forget my sins and my neighbors' sins the way that God forgets."* If only a husband could forget the sin of his wife, or a parent the sin of their child. If only we could see with our physical eyes the heavens opened and all our loved one's alive in the Lord. If only we could just see exactly how God is working to bring good from all the evil of this world

¹ John 4:48.

² John 4:48.

The royal official from our text came to Jesus with hope. Like many, he had just enough hope to turn to Jesus when his life was falling apart. But in the face of desperation, Jesus sees where faith is still lacking.

“Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.”³

You know, on another occasion in Jesus ministry some of the scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign too: *“Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you,”⁴* they said. There, Jesus was a little sterner: *“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except for the sign of the prophet Jonah.”⁵* God was not impressed with the scribes and Pharisees, and he wasn’t impressed by the royal official either. God’s Word brings men to their knees. His Word brings faith to its knees too. And when the exalted are humbled, when the royal official is made a beggar, then Jesus says, *“Go, your son lives.”⁶*

But really, what does that even mean to the father seeking a miracle? The ESV translation is a little off here with the future tense verb, “your son will live.” That’s not what Jesus says though. He says in the present tense, *“Go, your son lives.”⁷*

So, what, is he alive now but he’s going to die the next day? Will the father make it back before the boy dies? Does it mean that he’s alive in heaven? Or, could it possibly mean that he’s healed just like the father wanted? Jesus doesn’t say. He simple says, *“The boy lives.”* Take it and go.

To many, that might seem like a worthless gift. They’d rather have the gold, frankincense and myrrh than the baby in the manger. They’d rather have the copious volumes of data from scientists than the first chapters of Genesis. They’d rather have the signs and wonders than the Word. But these few words from Jesus have power. They have power because Jesus is God. He is God who brought all things into existence through the sound of His voice. He is God who heals the sick, calms the storm, and raises the dead, all through the power of His holy Word. God’s Word is sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing the heart of man. And what that means is that Jesus’ words are performative. When he says it, it happens.

³ John 4:48.

⁴ Matthew 12:38.

⁵ Matthew 12:39.

⁶ John 4:50.

⁷ John 4:50.

And so, “*the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way.*”⁸ He still might not have known exactly it means. He might not have been able to see it. Just like you can’t see the Word YHWH on your forehead after baptism, or see the sins washed off your body through the Word of Absolution, or see the body and blood of Jesus under the bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper. But even though you can’t see it, or you might not fully understand it, Jesus said it, and that’s good enough.

Really, this is how faith lives on the road from Cana to Capernaum without signs and wonders. This is how you live and the whole Church of God lives while we wait for Christ to come again. We live with the “*sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.*”⁹ We live hearing, receiving, praying, and speaking the Word.

It’s true that the man in our text did get the sign he hoped for. Jesus did heal his boy. Even more than that, he was not the first person to receive a sign from Jesus with his own eyes, nor would he be the last. John makes this clear when he says toward the end of the Gospel, “*Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples.*”¹⁰ But the point is that, despite what we see or don’t see, God provides. God who spoke the world into existence, who formed the heavens and the earth, who made the trees and creeping things each according to their kind, He provides all things in due time. The heavens bear witness to that when the rain falls on the just and the unjust. Yes, God provides, just not according to our timeline, but according to His.

The truth for you today is that the sign from our text is your sign, too. It is a sign given to all people. Jesus didn’t just heal the boy for his father. In fact, through Jesus’ work not only did the royal official believe, but his whole household believed with him. All Christians will get to see plenty of wonders on the Last Day with their own eyes and not another’s. And even now, they do get signs – many signs. The sign of water into wine, the sign of healing for the royal official’s son, the sign of the feeding of the 5 and 4,000, the sign of Lazarus being raised from the dead. These signs are preached into your ears by the power of Christ’s word. They are the signs that have been written by the Apostle John in the Spirit so that you may “*believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.*”¹¹

⁸ John 4:50.

⁹ Ephesians 6:17.

¹⁰ John 20:30.

¹¹ John 20:31.

And what's amazing is that, even amidst those signs which you haven't seen, are the ones that you do see. The sign of forgiveness received when you forgive others their trespasses just as the Father has forgiven yours. The sign of Christ's love received when a church comes together for the sake of a suffering family. The sign of the Spirit's handiwork when a whole household believes because of one father's faithful catechesis to his children. The sign of the Triune God's mercy when loved ones are relieved from sinning through the portal of earthly death.

All these signs, both seen with your eyes and not seen, have become your signs because of the greater sign – a sign that all others were building to and flowing from, a sign proving that your hope in the Lord is not in vain, a sign that means your walk from Cana back to Capernaum won't end in despair and sadness. This is the sign that even the scribes and Pharisees got:

For just as Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of the fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.¹²

This is your sign. A sign for the whole Church for all time. The sign that Jesus lives.

Yes, the royal official got his son back from the dead. But most importantly, Our Father in heaven got His Son back from the dead. At Calvary, God gave up His Son so that your sons might live – so that you might live. And when it was finished on the cross, when Christ was laid in the tomb, on the third day he broke the bonds of death and rose victorious declaring to God the Father what he once said to the royal official:

"Your Son lives."¹³

Jesus lives. So, while you journey through life like the man on his way back to Capernaum, let that be your sign. Jesus Christ was crucified for your transgressions and raised for your justification:

The Son lives.¹⁴

Just as those few words were enough for the royal official, let that be enough for you. Christ lives, and so will your children, and so will you. Amen.

**And the peace of God which passes all human understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
[Amen]**

Midweek following the 21st Sunday after Trinity

Genesis 1:1-2:3; Ephesians 6:10-17; John 4:46-54

¹² Matthew 12:40.

¹³ John 4:50.

¹⁴ John 4:50.

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