

## Signs and Wonders

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our healer and life-giver, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I'm not a very trusting person. I usually like to see the proof before I make up my mind on things. (SLIDE) If you're a mechanic, I apologize in advance, and there's no offence intended, but I find it difficult to trust mechanic's in general. Our son, Trevor hit a deer several years ago, right in the front passenger side of his Mustang. Unfortunately, the deer took out the computer and electronics systems of the car. We took that thing back to the shop over a half dozen times and every time the mechanic would tell us everything was fixed. We never did get that car running right. A couple of times as Trevor was leaving the shop his turn signals or the entire dash board would stop working before he even got home.

It's one thing when it's a car. It's another thing entirely when it's your child. (SLIDE) In today's Gospel a royal official comes to Jesus with that kind of desperation. His son is at the point of death. He'd walked miles uphill from Capernaum to Cana, clinging to one hope, "If I can just get Jesus to come down to the house, my boy might live." Jesus' response sounds almost harsh. "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." I'm not certain it makes much of a difference, but the you Jesus was referring to was a plural you. Unless you all see signs and wonders you all will not believe. Jesus was talking, at that point, to the entire crowd and to us, all these centuries later. Jesus is naming something true

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about the crowds, and honestly, about us. We want proof. We want God to work on our timetable, in our way, preferably right in front of our eyes with as many witnesses as possible. This father, a “Royal Official,” doesn’t argue, he simply pleads: “Sir, come down before my little boy dies.” Jesus doesn’t go with him. He doesn’t wave his hands. He doesn’t even pray out loud. He simply speaks, “Go; your son will live.” No x-ray. No MRI. No prescription medications. No confirmation text from home. (SLIDE) Just a promise and a long walk back down the hill some 18 miles from Cana to Capernaum. If we stopped reading right here we’re left in an awful in-between place. We still have a sick son. We still have a father who has nothing, but a few words from Jesus ringing in his ears. Will he take Jesus at his word or will he stand there until he sees proof?

(SLIDE) Imagine this is a news broadcast and now the reporter in Cana throws the audience over to the reporter in Jerusalem where Jesus has now arrived at the pool known as Bethesda. There He meets a very different person. Not a royal official, but a nameless man lying by the pool of healing, never getting the miracle he so desired. Day after day he waits by a pool that promises healing to the first person able to get into the water. It’s a cruel system. There’s only room for one winner, everyone else loses again and again, and again. His whole life has shrunk down to that pool and that excuse, “I have no one and someone else always gets there first.” Jesus doesn’t debate the superstition or fix the system. He simply

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speaks and the man is healed. That's when the trouble starts. (SLIDE) It's the Sabbath and instead of rejoicing with the man who had been disabled for 38 years and who was finally walking, the religious leaders criticize Jesus for doing it all on the day of rest. They completely miss the miracle because they're busy checking their rule books. I see the trouble in the story like this... First, we have a father who is desperate for proof that his son is healed. We have another man stuck for decades in a hopeless system where he can't compete. Finally, we see religious folks who care more about mats and calendars than about mercy.

It's not all trouble with a capital T. Woven through all that trouble is God's Grace and Mercy. First, look at the royal official. He took Jesus at His Word and started on his way back home. He had to trust Jesus before he saw the answer to his prayer. It was only after he departed when his servants met him with the news that his child is alive and well. Jesus doesn't make this man earn a miracle. He simply spoke life, and it happened, even from miles away. I noticed John used the deepest Greek word here. He didn't just give the boy physical life, he gave him so much more! The Greek word Jesus uses is Zoe, which means life that leads to eternal life. Zoe life is whole life. It's complete. For us the Zoe life begins at Baptism and never ends. Now look again at the man by the pool. Jesus chooses him. He doesn't even know Jesus' name at first. Yet, Jesus singles out this specific man who has been written off and left on the margins and heals him with nothing

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but his Word. The same creative Word that spoke galaxies into being, now speaks to broken bodies and broken lives. Jesus sees a beloved child of God, where the religious leaders see only a rule violation. His Word creates life where there was only fear, resignation, or legalism.

We are not so different from the people in these stories. Some of us know that father's walk home. We've prayed for a child, a spouse, a friend... and then had to live in that painful space between "Go, your son will live" and actually seeing anything change. Some things I've prayed my whole life for, but they haven't happened, at least the way I prayed, hoped for, and expected. (SLIDE)

We'd love faith to be like a switch. You pray, receive miracle, praise God. Instead, it often feels more like a long walk in the dark, with nothing but a promise in our pocket. When the healing doesn't come the way we hoped, we wonder, "Did I not pray right? Did I not believe enough? Is God really paying attention?" Faith can become transactional. If God does this for me, then I'll trust God. On the other hand, many of us know the quiet paralysis of the man at the pool. Some of us might be stuck in grief that won't lift, or in worry that keeps circling back, or in habits we hate, but can't seem to break. We might not say, "I have no one," out loud, but some days it feels that way. Or we've bought into systems that tell us we are in competition with everyone else. We might be tempted to think there's never enough time, enough money, enough success, so we scramble to be first into

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whatever pool promises to fix us. I should add too that some of us also have a little of those religious leaders in us, at least I know I do. (SLIDE) My training as an Air Force Inspector can rear up quite often and I can become more concerned about doing things “the right way” than about the people I care the most about. In our world today our faith gets drained by fear and waiting, our spirits get stuck on the edge of healing that never seems to come, and our religious hearts can grow icy instead of compassionate.

Into all of that, these stories hold out a deep, steady grace. (SLIDE) First, they remind us Jesus’ Word still creates life. When we hear the Gospel, when a child is baptized, when you come to this table and hear, “This is my body, given for you... this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you,” it’s the same Jesus speaking. You may not feel anything spectacular. The doctor may not call with the results you wanted. The situation at home may not change overnight. But Christ’s promise is not less real just because we can’t see or feel it right now on our schedule. The official discovered that his son began to recover at the very hour Jesus had spoken only after he was halfway home. (SLIDE) These stories show us who Jesus chooses to care for. He comes for the respected and important people like the royal official. He comes for the man no one will carry too. He comes for people like us on our best days and for us on the mat on our worst days. There is

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no one too powerful or too powerless, too privileged or too forgotten, to be beyond the reach of his life-giving Word.

I want you all to know and understand this next point... (SLIDE) Jesus' healings are signs. They're not the finish line. They point beyond themselves to the greatest sign of all, the cross and resurrection. The royal official got his son back—for a time. The man at the pool got his legs back—for a time. On Good Friday and Easter morning, Jesus doesn't just fix sickness; he walks straight into sin and death and breaks them open from the inside. He doesn't say, "Your son will live" to one family; he says to the whole world, "Because I live, *you all* will live too." (SLIDE) That means the deepest healing you and I need is already secured, whether or not we see all the smaller healings we pray for. As a congregation, we are a community that celebrates people getting up off their mats and reminding one another, week after week, that Jesus' Word is enough to sustain us even in the long walk home.

If your faith feels a bit thin these days, hear this as Christ's word to you, "Go... you will live." "Stand up... take your mat... and walk." Not because you are strong enough, but because his promise is strong enough. May the One whose Word created galaxies create new courage in you. May the Healer of Cana and Bethesda meet you in your sickness, your waiting, your questions. And may the

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crucified and risen Jesus fill you with the deep, overflowing *Zoe* life that never ends. Amen.