Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church
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Sermon manuscript

Sermon series: THIS Jesus

A Tale of Two Healings
(John 4:43--5:18)

Study #2

Introduction: Signs we have known and loved...

There are signs, and then there are signs.

Some signs are crucial for safe driving or good navigating. We depend on STOP signs and YIELD signs and speed limit signs.

Of course, some signs are just plain silly.

Like the church sign that reads, “Don’t let worries kill you. Let the church help!” or Dr. Clark’s Weight Loss Clinic which announces, “We’re expanding!”

Or this one, posted outside of a town hall meeting: “The purpose of this meeting is to answer any questions regarding the upcoming meeting to amend the voting requirements required to amend the documents for material alterations to the common elements and regular amendments to the documents.”

By way of review...

The message of John’s Gospel revolves around signs Jesus performed. His miracles were signs that pointed beyond the miracles themselves to something important about Jesus and His ways.

Last Sunday we saw the first of His signs in John, chapter 2 when He turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

By that “sign” He showed that He was all about taking something common and turning it into something noble and beautiful and fresh. He did that with water, and He’s been doing that with His followers’ lives for the last two thousand years.

Jesus intends to make out of each of us here today a stunning trophy of grace and that is part of what the sign of the wine says.

Following that miraculous sign event, Jesus traveled from the little village of Cana to Jerusalem to observe Passover. When He got there He found the Temple in such shambles that He was compelled to use a whip to drive out the moneychangers.

John tells us that while Jesus was there in the capitol city, Jesus did other, unnamed signs (2:23) which prompted many people to believe in Him. Then, He had redemptive conversations with two people, and John records those conversations one right after the other.

He spoke with Nicodemus, ”the teacher of Israel”, a respected member of the Sanhedrin, about eternal life. He told Nicodemus that he would have to be "born again" if he was going to see the kingdom of God.

And then He spoke to a woman of Samaria who had lived badly, but who had a genuine spiritual hunger. He told her that He Himself was source of the living water for which her soul thirsted. He urged her to trust Him - and she did, and then went out and told everybody in the village about Jesus.

On the road again - to Cana of Galilee (vv. 43-45)

After this trip through Samaria Jesus made His way back, north into Galilee. It is in Galilee that we will see Jesus perform another sign, the first of two we’ll observe today.

John tells us that the citizens of Galilee were eager to welcome Jesus back, for one primary reason.
Many of them had gone to Jerusalem for Passover and had seen Jesus perform lots of signs there. They couldn’t wait to see Him do more of the same in Galilee, too.

Jesus landed again in the little village of Cana, where He had performed His first miracle. This time He was nearly accosted by a man who was desperate for a miracle.

**Serving the Insider with Amazing Grace (vv. 46-54)**

**An Urgent, Fatherly Plea from a Believing Royal Official (vv. 46-49)**

*A heartsick father (v. 46)*

When a child of any age is sick, sad, or in trouble, hurt, in danger, or in rebellion, parents panic and grieve.

This man has come to Jesus to seek his son’s healing. Now, whatever beliefs he had about Jesus at this point were very elementary. But he came, faithfully, trusting that Jesus could do something if He was willing to.

The text implies that he was asking over and over and over again (“was imploring” denotes asking repeatedly).

Perhaps surprisingly, Jesus’ initial response wasn’t an encouraging one.

*A reproof from Jesus (v. 48)*

I get the sense that Jesus may have been testing this father, trying to see if he was just out to get a flashy show of power, or if there was more, more true zeal, more faith, more love, to his request.

He soon saw that this nobleman wasn’t just interested in seeing “signs and wonders.” He was desperate for his son’s life to be saved. If anything, the father became more insistent after Jesus’ reproof.

*A persistent father (v. 49)*

Heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and was imploring Him to come down and heal his son; for he was at the point of death.

The boy didn’t have a head cold. He was at death’s door. It’s not hard for any of us to put ourselves in this father’s shoes. He’s at his wit’s end to save his son.

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*A persistent father (v. 49)*

The royal official said to Him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.”

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1 While we aren’t told how old this boy was, by the language used, I would guess that he was a pre-adolescent.

2 Thirty two years ago, when we became parents, nobody told Kathy and me that we were taking on a lifelong assignment of caring for our children’s welfare, investing in their lives, hurting with their every pain, hoping and rejoicing and weeping with their lives’ up and downs. Our three kids are grown now, but I can confidently say that while active parenting stops at a certain point (and it should), yet the role of father and mother never ends.

3 As He offered this reproof to these Jews, can we imagine that perhaps at the forefront of His mind was the recent memory of the Samaritans who had responded with childlike trust, and apparently never asked for signs and wonders?
He wants Jesus to come to his home in Capernaum, stand next to his child’s bed, lay His hands on him, pray for him, and raise his son to full health.

Clearly, at least as he sees it, if there was going to be a healing, Jesus’ physical presence was required. That is why he was asking Jesus to come to his home.

And, just like that, Jesus turned from reproof to decisive action. He will heal the man’s son. In fact, He does. Just like that.

**Serving a Desperate Dad and Son (v. 50)**

*[50] Jesus said to him, “Go; your son lives.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off.*

Jesus will not go to the boy’s bedside. He won’t come to the house. He’ll stay right where He is in Cana and won’t go to Capernaum.

His words here are not to be read in terms of a prophecy, like, “Your son will be healed.”

No, this was a word of power, as in, “Let there be light.”

And off the father went, in the most literal way imaginable, walking to Capernaum by faith. The Bible says that he believed, and when Jesus said, “Go” He gave this dad an opportunity to exercise that faith.

I wonder what that walk was like. Was he attacked by doubts as he traveled? Was he more fearful or eager as he walked home? Did he dread what he would find when he walked through the front door, or was his faith in Jesus’ word firm?

He had to spend a night on the road between Cana and Capernaum (can’t you imagine that THAT was a long, sleepless night?!), because when he arose and started for the homestretch, a group of his personal slaves met him with some astonishing news.

**Performing a Long-Distance Healing (vv. 51-53)**

*Healed… (v. 51)*

*[51] As he was now going down,4 his slaves met him, saying that his son was living.*

So, everything’s fine! He’s outside playing with his friends!

And I love the one question he had for his slaves.

...by the word of Jesus! (v. 52)

*[52] So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” [53] So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives”; and he himself believed and his whole household.*

He asked the question because he just had to know. And sure enough, the hour at which his son was healed was the hour at which Jesus said, “Your son lives.” The recovery wasn’t coincidence or dumb luck. His son was healed by Jesus, long-distance.

And that led the man and his household (wife, children, and slaves) to read this “sign” - Jesus is trustworthy and they all placed their faith in Jesus.

Reading the signs...

*[54] This is again a second sign that Jesus performed when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.*

The first sign was the water to wine miracle. This second one says something about Jesus’ compassion to respond to the desperate longing of someone for another’s blessing. It says something about power, especially the power to heal with a long-distance word.

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4 Going down in elevation from Cana to Capernaum, which is on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.
As we keep reading we come immediately to the next of Jesus’ signs and this one takes place, again, in the city of Jerusalem.

**Serving the Outsider with Amazing Grace (vv. 1-18)**

**Setting the Scene for a Miracle (vv. 1-5)**

*Jesus, back in Jerusalem (v. 1)*

[1] **After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**

John doesn’t bother to tell us which of the Jewish feasts was being celebrated at this time. It probably wasn’t Passover as John is careful to tell us when Jesus was in Jerusalem for a Passover.5

But then, the big thing was not which feast was being observed, but the setting in Jerusalem to which Jesus was drawn at the feast.

*John gives us that setting.*

**The pool of Bethesda (vv. 2-4)**

[2] **Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes.**6 [3a] **In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered waiting for the moving of the waters;** [4] **for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.**7

5 This feast is then, likely, either Pentecost (50 days after Passover) or Tabernacles (a fall season harvest festival), or the Feast of Dedication (a winter feast).  
6 We don’t know, today, exactly where the pool of Bethesda was located in first century Jerusalem. But, the text does say that it was near the Sheep Gate, which was very close to the Temple.  
7 Most versions/translations of our English Bible tell us why the people were gathered there. If verses 3b-4 are missing from the normal text of verses in your Bible, they are probably at the bottom of the page or off to the side. They don’t appear in the earliest or best Greek manuscripts.

Most authorities are agreed that the end of verse three and all of verse four are not a part of the original Gospel of John. So, the Bible doesn’t teach that an angel of the Lord came down and stirred the waters, and that the first one in the water was miraculously healed.

**But, that was the local legend at the time.**

Around the world, sick and diseased people flock to waters that have supposed healing powers. Hot springs and mineral springs are famous for their healing powers. The same was true at this pool, Bethesda, in Jerusalem and lots of people went to this pool, hoping for healing.

Included in that big crowd was one especially pitiful man.

*A helpless invalid at the pool (v. 5)*

[5] **A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.**

We are not told how old he was, nor what was his specific ailment. All we know is that it was chronic and that it involved his not being able to walk. From a human perspective, the man’s situation was hopeless.

I suspect that lots of healthy people walked by that pool, walked by those crowds, and walked by this lame man.

Unlike the crowds who walked by, though, Jesus saw the lame man. Jesus asked him a very perceptive question.

**Healing a Lame Beggar (vv. 6-9a)**

*A discerning Jesus meets a long disabled man (vv. 6-8)*

**Jesus’ insightful question (v. 6)**

[6] **When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had already been a long time in that condition, He said to him, “Do you wish to get well?”**
That’s not a silly question.

For this man to “get well” meant the loss of a good steady supply of money from begging. It meant the necessity to work. It meant the loss of the pity of those he had come to depend on.

“Getting well” would mean change, and change is scary, even when it’s for the better. Change usually involves a process of struggle and trouble and some re-adjustment. Status quo, even a painful status quo, is, at least, familiar.

Jesus’ question to the man was right on the mark. Well, this guy DID want to “get well.”

But he did also have a problem. When it came to healing at the pool of Bethesda, it was survival of the fastest. And this man, being lame, could never get to the front of the line to be first in the pool.

The man’s courageous answer (v. 7)

[7] The sick man answered Him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.”

All of a sudden it is clear that this man was a man of faith. Not that his faith was in Jesus! Not even necessarily in God. He superstitiously believed in the healing waters of the Pool of Bethesda.

He didn’t know who Jesus was and he didn’t ask Jesus for any help (not even for help to get into the pool first). But he was clearly desperate to “get well.”

So, with no reference to healing waters, Jesus spoke to the man’s need.

Jesus’ words of healing power (v. 8)

[8] Jesus said to him, “Arise, pick up your pallet and walk.”

Now, put yourself on this man’s pallet for a moment. He had been lame, diseased for thirty eight years.

Now, some Guy he doesn’t know at all shows some interest in him, but gives him no handouts, and issues a command to stand up and walk.

If you were this man, what would you have been thinking? Maybe something like, “This is either an incredibly cruel hoax, or the best day of my life.”

Jesus is challenging this man to take an enormous “step” of faith - as great as the assignment to the father to go home to his dying son in Capernaum.

At the same time, if he chose to not take advantage of the Lord’s command and Jesus WAS able to heal, then he would lose the only chance he would ever have to walk again.

He may have felt terribly torn between the two options, but he finally came to see that NOT obeying Jesus was the greater risk. So, by faith, he moved.

A powerful Jesus heals this unsuspecting man (v. 9a)

[9a] Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and began to walk.

Can you imagine the state of his heart when he realized that the state of his body has changed? He made an attempt to stand and then found that he was able to walk around?

Talk about joy! Talk about the best day ever!

I love to think that he had hours of walking around and hours to relish the glory of his strong legs. That’s a nice thought, isn’t it?
But he probably didn’t have that much time to simply do a happy dance because a dark cloud was quickly looming on the horizon.

The ominous note that sounds at the conclusion of the story is John tells us, [*9b*] **Now it was the Sabbath on that day.**

“Ooops, sorry Jesus. You erred in performing this sign in terms of timing. You did it on the Sabbath, a day of rest meticulously enforced by the rulers of the Jews in Jesus’ day.”

During the three years of His ministry, much of the opposition Jesus faced was from the Jewish leadership regarding the observance of the Sabbath.

Their rules about what could and could not be done on the Sabbath were very stringent and legendary.⁸

- Spitting on a rock was OK, but you couldn’t spit on the dirt (because the spittle and the dirt together made mortar).
- Pulling out a grey hair was not OK.
- Wearing dentures was not OK.
- Writing was forbidden.
- Putting vinegar on your teeth to alleviate a toothache was forbidden.⁹

The Rabbis had so strictly regulated the Sabbath by the time of Jesus that the seventh day had ceased to be a day of rest, and had become a terrible burden.¹⁰

On this Sabbath, the Jewish rulers came to harass the man who had been healed on the happiest day of his life with an accusation of Sabbath-breaking for cot-carrying.

Before we conclude, I want us to see the final scene of this episode because it reveals the increasing opposition Jesus came to face, much of that because of this episode!

**Post-Healing (vv. 10-18)**

**Harassed on the Sabbath (vv. 10-13)**

[*10*] **So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.”**

From this comment it is clear that the pressing needs of simple people had ceased to be of any real concern to the religious rulers of the day.

Sure, they noticed that the man could now walk. They would have even admitted that a miracle had occurred.

But he was carrying his cot - and they were more concerned with the breaking of their tradition about no cot-carrying on the Sabbath than they were willing to rejoice that a man who had been lame for thirty eight years can now walk. How heartless!

Isn’t it striking how unstruck these guys were with the miracle?

Actually, when we look through the Bible we’re struck by how infrequently genuine, deep faith is built by miracles.

Now miracles are wonderful things and I’m sure not voting against them. But in the periods of biblical history when there were the greatest number of miracles, we certainly don’t find the most mature, widespread faith among the people of God.

There were lots of miracles in the days of Moses and Joshua and in the days of Elijah and Elisha. Those were days of rebellion and apostasy.

During the time of His earthly ministry, Jesus performed a lot of miracles - and was crucified.

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⁸ Thousands of Jews allowed themselves to be butchered in the streets of Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes rather than lift a weapon in self-defense on the Sabbath!

⁹ According to Rav Yehoshua Y. Neuwirth in a book entitled, *Shemirath Shabbath: A Guide to the Practical Observance of Shabbath*, modern conservative Judaism is just as strict about Sabbath observances as it was in the first century.

¹⁰ You’ll find that Jesus purposefully chose the Sabbath on many occasions to show His power, and to demonstrate the hypocrisy of the leading Jews.
As often as not, the response to the miracles of God and to the supernatural was a hardening of the spirit, not faith. And that is just what we see here, not only from the rulers and the Pharisees, but even from the man who was healed.

The rulers demanded that this healed man defend his evil, cot-carrying ways. He seems to me to be very quick to tell them that he was just following orders.

_A dilemma for the healed man (vv. 11-15)_

[11] But he answered them, "He who made me well was the one who said to me, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk.’"

He didn’t even know who it was who had healed him. So he placed the blame for his break with Sabbath-keeping tradition on “good ol’ what’s his name.”

The rulers pressed to find out who it was who gave him this diabolical command.

[12] They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk?’"

I think that they probably suspected Jesus, but the man who has been healed couldn’t tell them that it was Jesus. He didn’t know and he had no idea as to who Jesus was.

So, reluctantly, the Pharisees, who had been wanting to have some crime to pin on Jesus, let the healed beggar go.

And he headed straight for the Temple, a place he had not been able to go to for a long, long time.

That was also where Jesus had gone after having slipped away after the healing. And here, for the second time, Jesus looked for and found this man.

[13] But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place.

_[14] Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.”_

Jesus’ comment makes us think that this man’s illness was the result of divine discipline 38 years earlier (and perhaps it was). So, He warned him to lead a holy life, and with that, they parted ways.

We don’t know anything else about this man’s life. We don’t know if he ended up believing in Jesus, following Jesus, living for Jesus.

All we know is that as soon as he had the chance, he went right back to the Jewish rulers, who had been wanting to accuse Jesus of a Sabbath crime, and snitched.

_[15] The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well._

Now the rulers and Pharisees have a witness. Now, He has been named as guilty. And they immediately ramped up their opposition against Jesus.

3. The price a Savior is willing to pay (vv. 16-18)

_[16] For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath. [17] But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." [18] For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God._

The persecution, harassment, opposition, including death threats, picks up steam here. Jesus doesn’t at all back down, but meets them head on.

They accuse Him of breaking their traditions and He responds with a claim that He was simply doing what His Father - God! - is doing. Jesus is doing the kinds of things that only God can do.
And the opposition absolutely “gets” that Jesus was claiming equality with the Almighty.

What I don’t want us to miss, though, and what I have missed every time I have read this story my whole life, is that the opposition ramped up against the Lord right after the man He had healed identified that it was Jesus who had healed him.

**Conclusion:**

In moving through the life of Jesus on our way to Easter, we are using His “signs” as a template for understanding Him and His mission. Certainly, each and every sign showed His power. The signs are miracles only God could perform and they all demonstrate that Jesus is, as He claimed to be, God in the flesh.

But I am working under the assumption that each of the signs will tell us more, and that if we will look carefully at these signs we will see something about His ways.

In thinking about these two signs of healing we have seen today, it has struck me that nowhere else in the Gospel of John do we find two miracles placed right next to each other, prompting me to think that, perhaps, John wanted us to take them together.

I then remembered that these healings took place immediately after Jesus had conversations with two people, back to back, also unique for John’s Gospel.

Then I started noticing some parallels between the two conversations and the two miracles.

Jesus spoke with Nicodemus, *“the teacher of Israel”*, a respected Rabbi and a Pharisee who was upright and very moral. And, Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman, a member of a despised race and famously immoral.

Jesus healed the son of a faithful nobleman who had a high social standing. And, Jesus healed a lame beggar with no social standing at all.

Jesus was approached by Nicodemus and the nobleman; He Himself took the initiative with the Samaritan woman and the lame man.

In this section, Jesus’ reach extends to the extremes of the moral and religious spectrum. He was equally interested in people at either end, even in people who showed no interest in Him.

Perhaps what the signs we see today are saying about Jesus is that there is no one who is outside His target group. No matter where someone may be on the continuum of human decency, spiritual interest, or biblical morality, Jesus is for you.

With Jesus there is no “us” vs. “them.” We are all “them” and He wants us all to become His glorious, “us.”

These two signs point to a Jesus who is equally passionate to serve the insider and the outsider. He loves the biblically literate, moral Nicodemus AND the immoral Samaritan woman; the trusting nobleman and his son AND the superstitious lame beggar; you AND everyone you know.