

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Trustworthy

The Jesus You Didn't Expect

(John 5:1--6:15)

Study #4

Introduction: Great and Not-So-Great EXPECTATIONS... ..

In our first weeks of studying John's Gospel, we've seen a few people and groups who have met Jesus and have understood exactly what He was all about and who He was.

- John the Baptist declared Him to be **[1:29]... "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."**
- Andrew told his brother, Simon (Peter), **[1:41]... "We have found the Messiah."**
- Philip told Nathanael, **[1:45]... "We have found Him of whom Moses wrote in the Law and the prophets also wrote."**
- Nathanael told Jesus, **[49]... "Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel!"**
- Disciples who were at the wedding in Cana saw the water that Jesus turned into wine as a **"sign"** that Jesus was the Messiah.

It has been a treat to see these positive responses to Jesus. They had open eyes to see what He was all about and open hearts to believe.

However, today, we watch as two groups of people see **"signs"** that Jesus was the Messiah and did NOT believe.

Jesus didn't do what the Messiah of their expectations would or should do, trusted their expectations rather than what their eyes saw, and missed the flesh-and-blood Messiah right in front of them.

John brings us from Cana of Galilee, back to Jerusalem for the first of the two stories we'll see today.

A SIGN on a Sabbath at Bethesda (5:1-47)

A Miraculous Healing (5:1-9)

The setting (vv. 1-3)

The feast Jesus was attending (v. 1)

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

By **"these things"** John referred to what we saw last Sunday.

Jesus performed two works of power. One was the not miraculous cleansing of the temple. The other was the very miraculous healing of the royal official's very sick son.

Then we listened in on two life-changing conversations, one with Nicodemus and the other with the Samaritan woman.

In the first scene today, the Jews were observing one of the three annual feasts of Israel. We don't know which feast it was, only that Jesus was there, worshipping with the other Jews in Jerusalem.

The festivities of the feast were in full swing when John described a place and a scene in the city.

The pool of Bethesda (vv. 2-3)

[2] Now in Jerusalem, by the Sheep Gate, there is a pool which in Hebrew is called Bethesda, having five porticoes. [3] In these porticoes lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, limping, or paralyzed.

There are words that aren't included in my version of the Bible, but are present in some English translations tell us why people gathered at the pool.

They were **[4] *waiting for the moving of the waters, for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water. Whoever then first stepped in after the stirring up of the water was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.***¹

So, there was always a big crowd at the pool, waiting, hoping, for the water to churn, ready to get wet and to be healed.

John shifts our attention from the pool to one needy man at the pool on the day that Jesus was there.

A healing conversation (vv. 5-8)

A desperate man, long ill, was at the pool (v. 5)

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

John didn't say that this man had been at the pool for thirty-eight years. Only that he had been "*ill*" for that long. We can probably imagine that he had been at Bethesda, off and on, for a long time.

We know nothing about this man's life - not his name, his family, how old he was, or his backstory - but Jesus knew it all.

The all-knowing Jesus' question to this man (v. 6)

[6] *Jesus, upon seeing this man lying there and knowing that he had already been in that condition for a long time...*²

This man's last four decades with a crippling illness have defined his life. I assume that he couldn't work, so he begged. He couldn't support a family, so he had none.

Having put his hopes for healing in the pool of Bethesda, Jesus asked this man a question.

[6]...*"Do you want to get well?"*

There are questions behind that simply, profound question: "*Are you content being here? Have you lost hope for health? Does 'getting well' sound appealing?"*

Maybe even, "*Would you like for Me to help you get well...?"*

The man's answer answered Jesus' question.

The man's despairing response (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."*

He hadn't lost hope; he simply had no ability to do what he needed to do to avail himself of the healing powers of the pool.

The man wanted to "*get well*," but couldn't. Jesus wanted him to "*get well*," so He made it so.

The healing command (v. 8)

[8] *Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your pallet and walk."*

Notice. There is no evidence of this man's faith in Jesus - and Jesus healed him.³

Done - the man is healed (v. 9a)

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

¹ There is difference of opinion by scholars as to whether verse 4 (above) was a part of John's original Gospel or was a later addition.

² I assume that the man had not been born "*ill*" (lame, as we'll see), or John likely would have told us.

³ This is a third sign that Jesus performed signifying who He was.

Just like that, muscle tone was restored, coordination was back, intact. Thirty-eight years without walking - and he stood up, healed of his illness, picked up his mattress, and walked.

This was a mind-blowing miracle, a cause for great celebration.

It was a perfect day, except for one detail that John reveals, the one problem with the timing of Jesus' "**sign**": **[9b] Now it was a Sabbath on that day.**

To the Jewish rulers, as big a problem as Jesus' cleansing of the temple was, much bigger was His healing "**work**" on the Sabbath day.

Beginning right here, those rulers were out to get Jesus.

A Stunning Rejection (5:10-17)

They located the man who had been healed and reminded him, **[10]...*"It is a Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet."***

The now healed man told them, *"I picked up my pallet and walked because that Man who healed me told me to pick up my pallet and walk!"*

They demanded that he tell them who it was who had healed him, but he couldn't because Jesus had slipped away before he got a chance to get His name. (vv. 12-13)

But then this man had gone straight to the temple (of course he would, to give thanks!, to worship!) and that was where he learned Jesus' name.

They met in the temple and Jesus warned him, **[14]...*"Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."***

And then **[15] *The man went away, and informed the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.***

Some look at this as a tattle-tailing attempt by this man to cause trouble for Jesus.

I see it more as a man wanting to cooperate with the authorities and not so much as a deliberate attempt to get Jesus in trouble. Sadly, the net effect was trouble.

[16] *For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on a Sabbath.*

Now, to be clear, it WAS against the Mosaic Law for a Jew to do "**work**" on the Sabbath day. But this "**sign**" Jesus performed wasn't "**work**" like what God had in mind when He gave the command.

The Law's command was to take a break from the week's labor, take time to rest and to refresh, cease from toil, worship.

But the Pharisees added to the liberating commandment. They turned the Sabbath into a burden.

They classified all kinds of things as "**work**" - including putting restrictions on practicing medicine! - which made life on the Sabbath harder, not restful.⁴

Jesus was on solid biblical ground. But for their part,

[5:18]...*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.*

If you read on, you'll hear Jesus claim that He was only doing what the Father had showed Him to do.

And in the rest of this exchange with the ruling Jews, Jesus didn't withdraw from them. He stayed engaged, speaking truth.

⁴ The Old Testament put no restrictions on practicing medicine on the Sabbath.

He told them that the Father had given Him the authority to judge and that life - eternal life! - was only to be found in Him (vv. 20-32) and then He drew attention to all of the witnesses that gave testimony to Him.⁵

He wanted them to see enough to know that He was trustworthy so that they would believe in Him. But they rejected Him...because He healed a man on the Sabbath.

We'll return to this, Jesus' third "**sign**" as we close this morning to see what we can learn from their rejection. But now we'll move on to the fourth "**sign**" that John records for us.

And spoiler alert! What we are about to see is unique in that it is the only miracle Jesus performed that is recorded by John AND by Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

There is something about this event that all four Gospel writers viewed as so significant that they all included it in their record of Jesus' life and ministry.

And, not surprisingly, John included a final, critical, tragic detail to this story that the other Gospels didn't.

The pool of Bethesda was in Jerusalem, where Jesus healed the lame man. In this next scene, He has moved back north to the region of Galilee.

A SIGN on a Mountaintop in Galilee (6:1-15)

A Beautiful Setting (6:1-4)

The Sea of Galilee (v. 1)

[1] After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the sea of Galilee (or Tiberias).

The Sea of Galilee⁶ was (and is) the most prominent geographical feature of the region. This lake has been the center for commerce and population in that area for millennia.

And, being fishermen, a few of Jesus' disciples knew the lake well.

Beautiful mountains flank the east and west sides of the Sea of Galilee. And Jesus was there, at the Sea.

The Healer, healing (v. 2)

[2] And a great multitude was following Him, because they were seeking the signs which He was performing on those who were sick.

That's why there were there. They had heard about or had seen His miracles - and they wanted to see more.

He was graciously healing them. But, at some point, with His disciples in tow, He left the crowds.

Getting to a get-away (v. 3)

[3] And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.

If that abrupt climb seems to you to look like an evasive maneuver, it does to me, too.

We wouldn't blame Jesus for trying to get away from the crowds for a bit. They were always following Him. From time to time, He and His disciples needed some alone time. A retreat.

And it would have been a delightful scene, there up on top, especially at that time of year.

⁵ These include: **1 - John the Baptist**, vv. 33-35; **2 - His own miraculous works**, v. 36; **3 - the Father**, vv. 37-38; **4 - the Scriptures**, vv. 39-47.

⁶ Another name for the Sea of Galilee was "The Sea of Tiberias." In Old Testament times, it was referred to as The Sea of Chinneroth.

The Passover season (v. 4)

[4] Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.

Passover comes in early spring. Everything was in bloom. The weather would have been crisp and cool.

So, here's Jesus and the Twelve enjoying time together, taking in the scenery, having a great time talking. And they hear the noise of a crowd below. The noise was getting louder.

Finally, as they saw the huge crowds trudging toward them, Jesus turned to one of the apostles - Philip - and asked him about this developing "situation."

Jesus Provided (vv. 5-14)

Look who's coming to dinner (vv. 5-9)

Jesus and Philip discuss an obvious problem (vv. 5-7)

[5] Jesus therefore lifting up His eyes, and seeing that a great multitude was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?"

That question tells us that as much as Jesus may have wanted some R&R with His disciples, He truly cared for the people in the crowds. He cared so much that He wanted to provide for their need.

Of course, the people in the crowd had put themselves in this position of need. They were far away from homes or markets where they could have found bread. So, they had done this to themselves.

But Jesus didn't rebuke the crowds for coming into the wilderness ill-prepared and without food.

He saw their hunger, knew they needed help, and acted to provide for them what they couldn't provide for themselves.

In answer to Jesus' question, Philip assessed the crowds' need and gave his report. **[7]... "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for every one to receive a little."**

No doubt the disciples didn't have that much money on hand. Philip's report was just to report that they didn't have the resources to feed this many people.

Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, chimed in.

Andrew reported a food sighting (vv. 8-9)

[8] One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, [9] "There is a lad here, who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are these for so many people?"⁷

I think that Andrew knew his comment wasn't helpful even as he made it. The point of his comment wasn't to suggest a solution to the problem. It was to say, "There is no solution to the problem."

John has told us (verse 6) that Jesus knew full well what He was intending to do, and that His question to Philip was to "test him."

So...we wonder, did Philip (did Andrew?) pass the test? We are not told. We never get to see their report cards.

But it is at least clear that they believed the crowd was in big trouble, with no clear solution nearby.

It never dawned on them that they had been talking with the Solution. And we watch as the Solution went into action.

⁷ The barley loaves Andrew mentioned were like flattened pancakes. And the word for fish denotes a sardine-like "tidbit." Some have speculated that the fish were the young boy's morning catch from the Sea of Galilee.

A miracle of morsel multiplication (vv. 10-13)

Jesus gave another sign (10-13)

[10] Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.

There are many thousands of people present. There were probably ten to twenty thousand, counting women and children.

But notice that Jesus didn't tell the crowds to sit down. He told the disciples to tell the crowds to sit down. This miracle was to be a clinic in apostolic participation.

The role of the Twelve in what was about to happen was critical. They were to carry out Jesus' commands on the way to meeting the needs of the people who had come to Jesus.

The whole scene reminds us of a giant picnic. Beautiful scenery. Grassy slopes. Cool early spring weather.

Just one problem with this picnic. No food.

Well, food's coming, because it turned out that the boy's two fish and five loaves was plenty for Jesus to work with.

[11] Jesus therefore took the loaves and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted.

The miracle is recorded very matter-of-factly. Nothing dramatic. No thunder in the background as I read the verse.

Just a simple prayer of thanks to the Father for His provision, followed by a distribution of the multiplied loaves and fish, until everybody had their fill.⁸ There were even leftovers.

[12] And when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the left-over fragments that nothing may be lost." [13] And so they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, which were left over by those who had eaten.

The text doesn't tell us when the disciples got to eat these leftovers, or if they complained when they were served these leftovers, or if the leftovers finally got all moldy at the back of the refrigerator.

But let's not think for a moment that the number of baskets full of fragments was coincidental or unimportant. Twelve baskets meant one basket of leftovers for each one of the apostles.

Jesus gave them each a tangible picture of His ability to provide resources to meet the needs of people who would come to Him.

In the years ahead, Simon Peter, John, Andrew, Philip, and the rest will face tremendous hardship and great challenges. Every time one of these times would occur, they would each remember his own basket of leftovers to remind him: Jesus will provide.

They would remember the boy's bread and sardines, and how Jesus took what was available, multiplied it, and used it to meet needs.

In fact, they would spend the rest of their lives bringing Him their fish-and-loaves service-and-speaking and would watch as He multiplied it and met human need through it.

What a picture of life in Jesus that gives us.

⁸ Despite the fact that the Bible relates this event as a legit miracle, some have concluded otherwise. They suggest that what happened was a miracle of sharing. That is, when the adults saw the generosity of the boy who was willing to share his lunch, they pulled out their hidden stashes of food, so that everyone had enough to eat. (This was the version I heard in the church of my youth.). Then, there is the

"Sacramental" view. The boy's lunch provided enough to give everyone a taste in this, the world's first communion service. Neither of these two theories works, though. Jesus miraculously multiplied the two fish and five loaves of a young boy, so that all who were present had enough to eat.

We don't have much in the way of provision to meet other people's deepest needs. We have limited time and energy. A small store of wisdom. Not as much love as we wish we had. Just a couple of sardines and a few pancakes.

But we bring them to Jesus and offer these gifts to our friends. When we do that, He takes our words and our service and touches hearts, changes lives.

Addictions get healed and marriages are restored and hearts turn to Jesus because Jesus multiplies our fish and loaves to do what only He can do.

And, of course, multiplying this small amount of food to feed thousands was a **"sign"** that proved, again, His miraculous power. This display of power was not lost on the multitudes.

The crowds' excited response (v. 14)

[14] Therefore, when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world."

Of course they saw. They had been hungry and now they were full. With hunger satisfied, they shouted out their praise...and called Him ***"The Prophet."***

They saw this ***"sign"*** as a sign that Jesus was the leader that Moses said God would raise up in the future who would be just like he was. He would be called ***"The Prophet."*** (cf. Deuteronomy 18)

To be identified as ***"The Prophet"*** was high honor. But it was a far cry from being identified as the Messiah.⁹

These who were just fed didn't believe that Jesus was ***"the Christ / Messiah, the Son of God."*** (John 20:31)

They believed that He was a very special Someone. He was the kind of Man they were willing to follow...as long as He led them in the direction they wanted to go.

And Jesus understood perfectly well what they were thinking. So, He walked away.

Jesus Fled from a Crown (6:15)

[15] Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.

They were already somewhere up on this mountain. Jesus turned to walk farther up, away from the crowd, away from their praise, away from the crown they wanted to set on His head.

Imagine you are among those thousands who were just fed by Jesus. You have experienced the most thrilling event of your life, a miracle on the grandest scale.

You've come so close to seeing the inauguration of the Kingdom of God on earth that you could nearly touch it. And just like that, it's all over. The Prophet has just let a golden opportunity slip through His fingers.

You head back down the mountain, filled with food and with deep disappointment.

Here at the end, we'll recap these two scenes. The main thing here is, of course, that we not miss the main thing.

⁹ Note that John the Baptist made a distinction between Elijah, the Christ / Messiah, and The Prophet. (John 1:21)

Conclusion:

We've seen two scenes where people saw "**signs**" where they could have responded the way others did - like Andrew, Philip, Nathanael - but they didn't. They didn't believe in Jesus.

In the first scene, Jesus didn't conform to the expectations of what Jewish leaders expected that the Messiah should do and be.

Thus, the problem was not with the Messiah. The problem was with their expectations, which were off by a mile.

Jesus was and is the Messiah. (John 20:31) He offers eternal life as a gift to the one who believes in Him. That's who He is; those are His terms.

When anyone comes to Him, believing, they receive eternal life. If anyone comes to Him on any other terms, they lose everything.

In the second scene, normal Jews ate miraculously multiplied fish and loaves. They saw that "**sign**" and sought to use Jesus to keep on filling their bellies AND to satisfy their hunger for a kingdom, here and now.

As their king, He could restore Israel's glory, throw off Roman domination, usher in abundance and prosperity and grandeur.

But Jesus' hand would not be forced. He walked away from the crown they were preparing for Him so that He could continue building another kingdom, not of this world.

Jesus will one day establish a universal, earthly kingdom where there will be justice and peace. He will reign and rule, and all will be well.

As we have all noted, THAT kingdom is not yet here. But He is now building a kingdom, populated by those who gain citizenship by believing in Him.

Jesus is the king of THIS kingdom and all who believe in Him receive from Him the gift of eternal life.

This is the message we love and embrace and take from this place.