

..... Daily Devotions

**May 27 – June 2, 2018**

**By Pastor Chris Johnson**

**Christ the King Lutheran Church, Escanaba, Michigan**

*John's gospel is a beautiful portrayal of the ministry, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. The gospel – on one level – is very easy to understand: Eternal life comes through believing in Christ. The gospel – on another level – is very dense and symbolic. John ordered his gospel intentionally. In John's gospel we encounter seven "signs" which portray the glory of Jesus Christ. Though there is some debate about which signs are the seven signs, we'll look at following signs below this week:*

**Sunday, May 27<sup>th</sup>**

Read: John 2:1-11

***"Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."***

Jesus' first sign/miracle in John's gospel happens at a wedding in Cana among friends, disciples, and family. As we all know and remember, Jesus turns water into wine. This not only "manifested his glory" (John 2:11) but this sign also helped save face for the groom and his family. What ridicule they would've faced had they not provided adequate refreshments for their guests! A culture and people who greatly lifted up hospitality would not have been so slow to forget a family's error at such a beautiful moment as a wedding. Thanks be God, Jesus was there! Only, Jesus was going to perform this sign because *he* wanted to, not because his mother wanted him too. No one has Jesus at their own beck and call. Not even the Blessed Virgin Mary. Jesus saying to his mother "woman" isn't a slight. And we know Jesus loved his mother because of his care for her at the foot of the cross (John 19:25-27) and subtly shown in how, once resurrected, he folds his grave clothes, no doubt because his mother taught him (John 20:6-7).

This sign is important for us to remember and celebrate for a couple of reasons. (1) God has given humanity the gift of marriage. Man and woman join as one flesh in a holy union, not only for procreation, but also for mutual support, encouragement, and growth in holiness. As a church we must constantly pray for all those called to the estate of marriage. But also, as a church, we must constantly pray for all those called to live chaste celibate lives as well. (2) The Lord blesses a wedding with his presence. And what a joyful time marriage and marriage celebrations are! This reminds us how God is not some cosmic killjoy, but the one in whom true joy is experienced (John 15:11) and that very joy spills into every aspect of our lives: Work, marriage, child rearing, worship, and so on.

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, you have given to this world the gift of marriage, the gift of joy, the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us to pray for those whose marriages are struggling. Help us to minister to those going through divorce. Help us to remember and welcome single mothers and fathers. Help us to remember the gift of celibacy in a culture often obsessed with sex. Help us to joyfully serve and follow you, our life-giving Lord, knowing that our relationship status isn't what ultimately defines us, but it is your claim upon our lives which does. Amen.*



**Monday, May 28<sup>th</sup>**

Read: John 4:46-54

**“Go, your son will live.”**

The second sign of John’s gospel is Jesus healing the son of an official. This official most likely worked for Herod Antipas, “that fox” (Luke 13:32) Jesus once spoke of. He may have been a Roman or a Jew being paid by the Romans. Either way, this official wouldn’t have been the town’s favorite person. He would have been a Donald Trump supporter visiting the big city of Minneapolis or Chicago. He would have been an Obama supporter visiting a town in the Appalachians. As we look at our passage notice which town are we in: Again, we find ourselves in Cana – the site of Jesus’ first sign. As Jesus was making his way through Cana this official, desperate, distraught, and fearing his son’s death, asked Jesus for a favor: “Please, heal my son!” Jesus’ response isn’t what we’d expect. Jesus chastises this man, and the others who can see and hear what’s going on: “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” How could Jesus be so pastorally insensitive? What’s all the more remarkable is this official’s persistence. This story is very reminiscent to the story of Jesus encountering the Canaanite woman who speaks of dogs receiving crumbs from the master’s table (Matthew 15:21-28).

Jesus heals. He heals sicknesses, depressions, mental instability, the demonically possessed, and the like. Nowadays, God works through the wonders of modern medicine, but God also works miracles on rare occasion. But miracles, “signs,” aren’t the most important thing. As wonderful as being healed from cancer is, as wonderful as any healing to mind or body are when and if they come should it be God’s will, an even greater need we have is faith, belief, a living and daring confidence in the Lord God almighty. Someone can be healed and be lost, damned forever if their healing does not lead them to faith in Christ – we’ll see that example tomorrow. Someone can also have one health complication after another, never getting any better, slowly dying a painful death, yet even in their misery they hold strong, glorify God in their suffering, believe in God’s love for them, and – even though many might think “How could God let this happen to them” – the sick person thinks “Lord, I thank you for the life I do have. I thank you that one day, in the resurrection, I will be made new. Until then Lord, help me witness to your power and love even in the midst of my affliction. Lord I have you, I believe in you, and that is enough for me.”

Let us pray: *Sovereign Lord, we seldom understand the ways you work, why you do the things you do, why you permit things to happen to me, to friends, to family, to the world around us. I don’t understand, but I believe. I believe that you will one day make things perfect and beautiful again. I believe one day sickness, illness, cancer, heart attacks, strokes, and other malignant diseases and afflictions will be gone. Until then help me to have sympathy on those suffering. Until then help me keep the faith. Until then help me to witness to your love even in the midst of unimaginable suffering. You are our only hope. Amen.*



**Tuesday, May 29<sup>th</sup>**

Read: John 15:1-17

***“See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you!”***

The third sign in John’s gospel is another healing. This sign takes place not in the confines of rural Cana, but in the big city of Jerusalem. There is so much in the sign that offends the modern reader. Of all the people sick and unwell, why did Jesus only heal this one man? Jesus could have had a field day displaying his miraculous power to heal and restore but for one reason or another he chooses this one man, someone who’s been an invalid for 38 years (John 5:5). Jesus asks a rather odd question: “Do you want to be healed?” Who wouldn’t want to be healed? It seems as if this man really doesn’t. This man doesn’t even directly respond to Jesus’ question, but gives an excuse for why he hasn’t been healed already (5:7). Surprisingly, and with no clear answer, Jesus heals this man anyways! Grace is a wonderful thing!

Just think, if you could, why this man doesn’t answer Jesus’ question directly. What if he was healed? Then he couldn’t beg anymore. Then he couldn’t feel sorry for himself anymore. Then he couldn’t shame other people into feeling sorry for himself anymore. He no longer can play the victim of misfortune. If he was healed he would have to become a contributing member to his family. But he was healed! He was healed, and the religious authorities realize this and ask him how this happened. This man, who didn’t even bother to get his Divine Helper’s name, couldn’t say. But when Jesus saw him again, Jesus gave him a warning: “Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you!” This could be referring to what caused this man to be an invalid originally. This could be referring to his negligence of not bothering to know who Jesus is. But what happens next? Like a rat, once he has Jesus’ name he scurries back to the religious authorities to tell them who exactly healed him: Jesus.

This story is in direct contrast to the one from yesterday. Both men – the official and invalid are undeserving. But the two men respond differently: One with faith, the other with a “Well thank you for that Jesus! Now if you don’t mind me, I’ll be on my merry little way” attitude. This man, it appears, did indeed sin more and something worse may indeed have come upon him: The righteous condemnation of God on those who don’t believe (John 3:18).

Let us pray: *Heavenly Father, though you seek to show yourself to this world through the Church, through your Christians, through your Word, some people remain opposed to your mercy, opposed to your Son, even if they have received so much good. Forgive them Lord, they know not what they do. Help us to walk alongside people who don’t “get it” that one day they will. And help us to be humble knowing we don’t have all the answers either. Help us to remember all the more that Jesus – his love, mercy, power, and forgiveness – is the one answer that truly matters. Amen.*



**Wednesday, May 30<sup>th</sup>**

Read: John 6:1-15

***“This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”***

We all know how much hunger remains an issue throughout our world and certainly in the United States. And what an amazing job ELCA World Hunger and other agencies do! We need to keep lifting up these essential ministries of mercy. Hunger was a problem in Jesus’ day too; more than we could ever imagine. If a drought happened or blight struck crops, so many people would be affected and no international relief organization would be on stand-by to help. In today’s sign, the 4<sup>th</sup> sign of John’s gospel, Jesus feeds the multitude with what amounts to a child’s “Lunchable” – five small bread loaves and a couple of sardines. It truly is an astounding miracle Jesus performs. It’s so astounding the crowd, with hungry bellies now full, want to make “the Prophet” to also be their “king,” even if by force (John 6:15)! And who wouldn’t have thought the same or wanted to do the same, especially if you haven’t had a meal in days?

We need food for our bodies and we don’t need science to tell us that, our growling bellies does the job just fine. But what our bodies – and science – won’t tell us is that we need Jesus “the bread of life” (John 6:35). Yes, there is a physical hunger God satisfies – “Give us today our daily bread” and the main reason why people aren’t fed is because of human malice, greed, and hoarding of resources. God isn’t to blame, people are. But there’s also another hunger only God can satisfy, a spiritual hunger for meaning, for value, for redemption, and for hope in a world where the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, in a world where sin runs rampant and the devil kills by people buying the lies he peddles as truth (John 8:44). This spiritual hunger can only be satiated by Jesus Christ. The work of the devil can only be crushed by Jesus Christ. Nothing else and no one else will do.

This is why at the end of John 6 so many people desert Jesus (John 6:66). Here they thought Jesus would be their meal ticket, their constant provider of food stamps. But Jesus is more than that. Jesus is more important than food, more important than burgers, fries, pasties, venison, and the like. You can be well fed yet perish eternally. You can be poor and perish eternally. Rich and poor and middle class all need Jesus. Everyone needs Jesus. And it is only through Jesus and the spiritual hunger he satisfies will physical hunger, in turn, be satisfied too. Christians converted by the power of the Spirit through faith in Christ feed the hungry. Sinners, like Zacchaeus, who were greedy become generous saints. Hoarders of earthly goods joyfully give out of their abundance to those in need. Those caught in cycles of poverty, through the power of Christ, break the chains of victimhood and oppression, call to account those in power who have been abusing their power, joyfully suffering the consequences as they live their lives in light of the gospel, in light of knowing Jesus is our “bread” and with him, we will always have enough.

Let us pray: *God of abundance, continue to challenge and stir in us a righteous anger at injustice – both throughout the world and in our own country – when the hungry remain left unfed because of human sinfulness. Challenge us – people who have so much – to give generously too. Break the reluctance that shackles our hearts, our wallets, and purses. Help to always realize with Jesus, your beloved Son, we will always have enough. In times of plenty and scarcity, because we have Jesus, we have enough. Amen.*



**Thursday, May 31<sup>st</sup>**

Read: John 6:16-21

***“It is I; do not be afraid.”***

Jesus walking on water, the 5<sup>th</sup> sign, appears in every gospel except Luke. This miraculous sign happens in the midst of Jesus trying to get away from the Judean crowds who are attempting to force him to be their king (John 6:15). Jesus goes away, the disciples try and follow him and, in short order, so too does the crowd on the following day (6:24). The disciples, however, get to see something special. They get to see their Lord walking on water. In the midst of the storm’s fury, waves crashing, winds whipping, disciples furiously rowing for dear life to get to Jesus, of all things that could frighten them in this moment it is *Jesus* who sends a shot of terror down their spines (6:19). One doesn’t see people walk across water everyday though; and walking on frozen water in the U.P. doesn’t count!

Fear can absolutely cripple us. Fear of the future, fear of a hidden secret or a hidden sin coming to light, fear for our children, fear for our churches, fear of anything really. Fear is a powerful inhibiting influence on our lives. What is it you fear? What is it you fear, dear Christian, and bring it to Jesus who says “...do not be afraid!” Jesus is your Lord, he is your Good Shepherd, he is the one who through his death and resurrection has “conquered the world” (John 16:33). Through faith in Christ we too can conquer all (1 John 5:4) which seeks to deprive us of the life God wants, wills, and intends for his beloved children who have been born again by the power of the gospel. Do not be afraid; you have Jesus but even more importantly, Jesus has you. His grip on you is far stronger than your grip on him and he will not let you go! No one will snatch you out of his omnipotent, loving, holy hands (John 10:27)!

Let us pray: *Oh Lord, how weak we are and how frightened we can become! Sometimes even our own shadows scare us! As Adam and Eve were terrified by your presence in the garden by the rustling of leaves, help us to never fear anything because you are our Lord, our Friend, our God. We cling to you for life and salvation. We cling to you for hope and healing. We cling to you to put our fears to rest knowing all will be well because you love us so. Amen.*



**Friday, June 1<sup>st</sup>**

Read: John 9:1-41

***“For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.”***

The sixth sign of John’s gospel is Jesus giving sight to a man born blind. In case we miss how magnificent this sign is, John reminds us through the words of the man born blind who now can see: “Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind!” (John 9:32) This is no small miracle! However, what Jesus is showing us in this sign – all signs point beyond themselves to Jesus – is how Jesus, the “light of the world” (9:5) brings sight to all those who are spiritually blind. Like those who hunger for food and not for God, so also are those who can see and yet be blind to the things of God. In John 3 it seems as if Nicodemus doesn’t “see” Jesus (though by 19:39 he does). The invalid of John 5 couldn’t “see” Jesus. The various religious leaders in constant controversy with Jesus in John 7-9 can’t “see” Jesus though their eyes work just fine.

What Jesus is directing our gaze to is the need of having the “eyes of our hearts enlightened” (Ephesians 1:18). Someone may have 20/20 vision yet be lost eternally because they don’t “see” Jesus as the beating heart of the Scriptures. Someone may have 20/20 vision yet be lost eternally because they don’t see Jesus as the means of salvation (John 3:14-15). Someone may have 20/20 vision yet due to the cataracts of sin and unbelief, the glaucoma of pride, wealth, and luxury, completely miss out on Jesus. Only through the eyes of faith will we see Jesus for who he truly is in all his magnificence and beauty. Only through the eyes of faith will the glories and riches of heaven fill our hearts with a longing for our forever home with God. And so, let us ask Jesus, in the words of the Irish hymn:

*“Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;  
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.  
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night,  
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.”*

Let us pray: *Gracious Lord, help me to see you. Help me to see you at work in worship by your ever-present Spirit. Help me to see you in the suffering and plight of others. Help me to see you as Lord and God, Savior of the world. Open my eyes to see Jesus, Lamb of God, who took away my sin, who died a death I deserved, who rose triumphantly for my salvation. May I never stop giving thanks for you work in my life, the work that helps me to see, believe, trust, and follow you. Amen.*



**Saturday, June 2<sup>nd</sup>**

Read: John 11:1-44

***“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”***

Death, St. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 15:26, is our enemy. There is nothing good about death. Death in one sense can certainly alleviate someone’s pain and suffering, but death is not good. The modern notion of assisting death to do its work – what is called euthanasia – helps this enemy. There are human enemies that can become friends, people we are called to pray for that they might convert, repent, and be transformed by God’s love. But death cannot be our friend. We cannot help this enemy do its work. Christians are ultimately about life. And it is because we take life so seriously that we treat death so seriously too. Death takes and doesn’t give back. Death is our enemy. Life is a precious gift; from conception to the end of this earthly life.

So, we come to our text from John 11 and see Jesus do something peculiar: He lets death happen. He doesn’t stop death from claiming Lazarus, a beloved friend (11:36). Mary and Martha, Lazarus’ sisters, are beside themselves, and why shouldn’t they be? Both sisters say, “Lord if you had been here...” (11:21, 32). Jesus could have stopped this from happening, but he didn’t. And why? For the same reason all the other signs were done, “...that you may believe” (11:15). Believe what? Believe in who is the better question! Believe in Jesus. Believe in Jesus because he is the one who has the power and authority to put death to death. Believe in Jesus because he is the one who gives life through the sacrificial offering of his own life for his friends (15:12-17). Believe in Jesus because through him we have life, *zoē* in Greek, God’s life which streams to us through faith.

This 7<sup>th</sup> sign of John’s gospel shows Jesus giving life to the dead man, Lazarus. Jesus resuscitates, revivifies his dead friend whose stinking corpse (11:39) lay entombed. Lazarus rises from the grave – a foreshadowing of Jesus’ own resurrection – and what happens after is telling: The religious powers that be seek to kill both of them (12:9-11). The “world” in John always seeks to put life to death. Jesus won’t have it. Jesus puts death to death with his life. And it is in that truth, reality, and promise we can close our eyelids for the last time knowing to whom we belong, knowing what great lengths our Lord has gone for us. Christ is risen! And because he is risen so too, one day, shall we.

Let us pray: *Lord of life, you know who truly belong to you, who believe in your Son, who have life in his name. Grant us peace throughout our earthly lives knowing eternity has been secured. And because eternity has been secured, Lord help us to bring a part of heaven to this fallen world. Help us to bring your life to a world full of death, that all might see your life-giving power at work through your church and so believe in Christ as Lord. Amen.*

