

Signs: The Child

John 4:39-54

The Interview: As I begin my message today, I want to speak with Sandra Shepherd, who has been serving us wonderfully today as one of our worship leaders. But, just over a year ago, we wondered whether Sandra would ever do this again. Sandra, I call you one of our miracle-members because, last year, you were on the top of my prayer list. Let's talk about what happened.

First, Sandra, tell us a bit about what happened to you just over a year ago. (And Sandra will share that her condition was an extremely serious one that both of her parents had died from prematurely – and that fewer than 30% of those who have it ever recover.)

Second, I know you had some wonderful doctors and experienced effective medical procedures. But, did you sense that God was at work in all this? If so, how did you experience the healing power of Jesus? (She will share about how she believes that God healed both through natural and supernatural means to his glory.)

The Challenges: From our Scripture reading and from Sandra's testimony, I imagine you know that we will be talking about faith and healing today. So, at the outset, let me tell you that there are always challenges when a pastor speaks about faith and healing. Let me tell you a few of them:

1. **Jesus healed people – but he did not heal everyone.** In last week's sermon from John 5, Jesus went to a pool named Bethesda in Jerusalem next to which we are told that "*a great number of disabled people*" were lying. But, Jesus healed only one of them. Because of that, I think we should not be surprised when not everyone in church experiences a healing in church like Sandra did. But, that fact often leads us to become angry when someone else gets healed and we do not. So, that leads to my next point.
2. **Healing miracles are wonderful – but all physical healings are temporary.** As far as I know, none of the people Jesus healed over 2,000 years ago are still alive. Therefore, as Jesus said forcefully and clearly in our Bible text today, miracles of physical healing are only signs, i.e., temporary acts that point to something much better, i.e., to divine healing that will last eternally. Therefore, in a church, we should be guard against signs becoming idols – as they seem to have been for many in Jesus's day.
3. **God sometimes heals through supernatural means – but other times through natural ones.** In some situations, I believe God's healing involves both -- as I believe was the case with Sandra. But, if you hold to the Bible's view of creation, i.e., that all the medicines that heal are made by God and all the knowledge that leads to medical procedures that heal are a part of God's truth too, then you know that all healing ultimately comes from God and should lead to thanksgiving and praise.

From all this, here at LAC, we pray for God's miraculous healing when people are sick or infirm. And, we have many stories of witnessing God's supernatural healing power. As we pray, we look to James 5:14ff that teaches us that God's supernatural healing power is often evidenced within the context of a person's local church. In that passage, when a church person is sick, he or she should call the spiritual leadership of the church to anoint with oil, lay on hands, and pray for healing. We do that here. Indeed, we will give you an opportunity to come receive prayer at the end of my message today.

And, at the same time, we thank God for good doctors and for good medical research leading to new healing processes and medicines. When any person is gets well, we give praise to God. Amen?

With that in mind, let's look at the story of Jesus healing a little child.

The Story

The Setting: Genuine Faith among the Unexpected

The healing episode we come to today takes place just after Jesus had just spent two days in Samaria, a place whose people had a different ethnicity and different religion from those of the Jewish people. Jewish people and Samaritan people avoided one another at all costs. But, not Jesus. Jesus intentionally went through Samaria. And, while there, Jesus led a Samaritan woman to faith. Moreover, that woman was a person his culture would have said a man should not even speak to, a Samaritan woman who had been divorced 5 times and was currently living with her 6th man. And, that woman's life was turned around by faith in Jesus.

Jesus's encounter with her resulted in her giving witness about him to every person she saw. See **4:39**: "*Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony.*"

So, I want you to notice that **Jesus personally stepped into the lives of people usually polarized from one another** – He entered into lives of people different in 1) **Gender**: a man was not supposed to speak to a woman in their culture, especially a woman like this one; 2) **Ethnicity**: a Jew should avoid a Samaritan; and 3) **Religion** – a faithful Jew (and especially a rabbi) should not be dialoging with an adherent to the Samaritan religion.

But, what we see is that Jesus came to do a broader kind of healing in this world than most imagined Messiah would do. Through his presence and work, he brought together and healed all those divisions that were broken in this world he had made. Jesus invited people way, way out on the margins into the one kingdom of God. It should always make us ask who those people would be in our world – people on the margins but still people Jesus would have gone to in order to bring good news of hope and salvation.

After this remarkable work in Samaria, in v. 42, Jesus returned to his home in Galilee. In Samaria, a whole town came to faith without any miracles. The people there simply believed Jesus's word. See **4:42**: The new believers in Samaria said to the woman at the well, "*We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.*"

So, in 4:42, Jesus returned to being with his own people in Galilee. Earlier, in 2:23, his own people had loved his miracles but, listen to what **2:24-25** reports, "*Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people... he knew what was in each person.*"

The Encounter: A Need Followed by a Shock Followed by a Promise

So, Jesus was welcomed back by his Galilean homefolks, but only a certain kind of welcome. Sadly, their welcome came only because Jesus had been doing miracles – and they wanted more of them! It was like the old P.T. Barnum shows portrayed in the movie, *The Greatest Showman*, a show that drew thrill seekers all over the world back in the 1800s. https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/1/10/The_Greatest_Showman_poster.png When you read what happened in today's passage, you see that the people didn't want to follow Jesus. They only to have Jesus do some stupendous signs!

But, another family, likely a non-Jewish family, had heard about Jesus's miracles. So, in v.47, the father of that family had come seeking Jesus's help. He traveled 15-20 miles from Capernaum to Cana and, the Bible reports, "*begged Jesus to come and heal his little boy, who was close to death.*" And, I imagine that Jesus's response to this desperate father seems rather callous to you. Jesus did not speak only to the man but, after hearing about this child who being close to death, Jesus spoke to the entire crowd assembled there and declared, "*You people, unless you see signs and wonders, you will never believe (4:48)!*"

What do you think of that? As you may know, Jesus often did this. He made statements that were almost shocking. No, they were shocking! Why did the loving Jesus say something like this?

This brings me back to the point I spoke of earlier, i.e., that it's challenging to speak of healing and faith. In Jesus's day and in ours as well, people intuitively think that the important things are temporary things, often physical and material things. But, Jesus insisted that those things we often think are the most important are just signs. A sign points to things much more important and much more enduring than the sign itself.

So, when we are in pain, or when those we love are hurting, we can hardly imagine that there is something more important than a healing. What happens is this: We know we should put God first and love him with our whole beings. But, **knowing that Jesus can heal, we easily find ourselves putting the healing first and turning to Jesus only for what we think he should do for us.** What we want him to do seems, at the time, to be more important than Jesus. And, just as happened when Jesus lived in Galilee, when he doesn't do what we think he should do, we grow angry and sometimes, turn away from him altogether.

What we need is what Stephen Covey, in his 1989 book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, called a "paradigm shift". In it, he put this picture: <https://www.achieve-goal-setting-success.com/images/combinedwoman.gif> Do you see an old woman or a young woman when you look at it? Research shows that whatever you first see greatly affects whether you are able to adjust and see something more. A paradigm shift is a fundamental change in perspective, approach or underlying assumptions. When you suddenly see something more than you first saw, you experience a paradigm shift.

Maybe this picture will help you to see more than one woman: <https://qph.fs.quoracdn.net/main-qimg-068a2278e32ef151c506e465ba412dc2>

Jesus knew that, in a world in which we so easily only see the material and temporary things as being truly real and truly important, out of his love for us Jesus speaks these shocking words to help us see what is most important. **The fact that Jesus can heal physically is a sign pointing to what he ultimately will accomplish**

through his death, resurrection, sending of the Holy Spirit and establishment of the church. **He came to heal all that is broken. To make right all that is wrong in his creation.** Do you see it?

The Faith in Jesus -- That Leads to Healing

The father is not deterred by Jesus's comment to the crowd. I think it's because this man knew he had not come seeking a thrill. He was a man in desperate need. Let me tell you about him. He's called a "royal official", which meant that he was a high ranking official in King Herod's service. Neither King Herod nor most of his officials were Jewish either ethnically or religiously. The more devout Jewish people in Galilee did not like having the Herodians among them. So, how would this Galilean rabbi deal with him?

He didn't say to Jesus, "Do you know who I am? I'm in the court of the king, so you had better listen to me!" No, this father simply said, "*Sir, come down before my child dies.*"

Can you feel the emotion in his words? Have you ever known a child who is seriously sick? Have you ever had a sick child in your family? I can think of no greater fear than parents knowing our child is near death.

This is Mothers' Day. As a number of us were working on this passage last Tuesday, our Director of Counseling, Tsega Worku, said, "People in church will wonder where the mother was when this man traveled to seek Jesus's help." And, we all agreed – Mom was home caring for her sick little boy. That, I declare to you, is a high calling! And, probably, she told her husband in no uncertain terms, "That man who heals people is in Cana. You go over there now and don't come back until you get him!" And, although he was the King's official, he did what she said. Can't you imagine that?

And, Jesus sees this man and his need. He does not speak to him as a royal official but as a father. **Jesus did what I pray we will all learn to do, i.e., He did not just see the surface – the fact that this man was a king's man, a Gentile, an outsider every bit as much as the Samaritan woman had been. No, Jesus saw him -- his true heart, need, and condition.** Jesus said, "*Go, your son will live.*"

And, the man went. In his going, I recognize a clear example what followers of Jesus have long said that genuine, rescuing faith includes. We all know that, as James 2 says, even demons believe that Jesus is who he says he is, but they do not believe in a way that saves them. What kind of faith do we see in this man?

1. **Believers Know** – This man had heard who Jesus was. You see, we cannot believe what we do not know. That's why **Romans 10:14** says, "*How can people believe in one about whom they have not heard?*" That's why our witness to Jesus is so important. The first step necessary in faith is to know.
2. **Believers Assent** – The man not only knew what people said about Jesus, but he also assented to it being true. Again, even demons assent to Jesus being the savior and not be saved. But, one part of rescuing faith is saying, "I assent to the fact that Jesus is who he says he is."
3. **Believers Trust** – Jesus said, "*Go; your son will live,*" and the man went. He trusted Jesus and went. He did not insist on seeing the miracle. He did not complain that Jesus would not come with him. He simply did what Jesus said. **V. 50** -- *The man took Jesus at his word and departed.*

It was a 16-20-mile journey. He couldn't call for an Uber or Lyft. Can you imagine that trip? I imagine a lot of us of wondering: Was that real? Should I really trust that Galilean? What will my wife say if I come home without Jesus? That father did not get home until the next day! I'm sure that, as he traveled, he prayed the prayer found elsewhere in the Bible, a prayer I continue to pray often: "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief." But, whatever questions or doubts he may have wrestled with, he trusted Jesus and went home."

And, you already know the end of the story: *While he was still on the way home, his servants met him with the news that his little boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him." Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and his whole household believed (Jn 4:51-53).*

Knowledge – assent – trust. The three elements of genuine, rescuing faith. **V. 54** adds: *This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.* It was a sign that Jesus had come to heal – in the broadest sense of that word. This sign points to when Jesus has finished the work he came to do. Then, there will be no more sickness and no more pain. But, did you see it? Jesus came also to heal all the brokenness in his creation: physical, mental, racial, gender, political, relational... It's all in this story.

Jesus has come to make right all that is ailing and broken. So, when there is painful as a child being near death, you should come to Jesus. He may want to do something more than a mere sign – a temporary healing. But, you and I should ask him to heal. And, when Christians ask, we ask as Jesus asked when he prayed: Jesus prayed specifically: *“Father, take this cup from me.”* But, we also pray knowing that God may be doing more than a mere sign will accomplish. As Jesus prayed: *“Your will, Father. Not mine.”*

So, here at LAC, we should, and we do pray for healing. We pray specifically for healing. And, when we do, we know we don’t have to beg God to care or to do what’s best. No, we already know that he loves us more than we ever could love ourselves.

So, even though complete healing will not come until Jesus returns, I want to tell you that Jesus still does heal in the here and now. And, God’s Word says that sometimes we have not because we ask not. According to James 5, when it comes to healing, our asking often comes in the context of our local church.

Because of that, I’ll give you a chance to have your church pray with and for you right now. Have you come to church with longing for some kind of healing like this man? It may be for yourself, for a family member or a friend. It may be for someone far away! Remember that the little boy was 16-20 miles away from Jesus when Jesus healed him. He could have been 15,000 miles away. It would not have mattered. When Jesus speaks with authority, there are no spatial limitations to his power.

The need that you have burning in your heart may be for physical healing – or emotional, relational, or spiritual healing. This sign points to all those. Jesus cares. And, he may be doing something in your situation that you cannot fully see right now. You may have to stay on that journey of faith with him for a while as the father did. A part of genuine faith is learning to trust God and wait for him. But, learn to ask him too.

So, what I want you to do is to step out and come for prayer. Our spiritual leadership will be taking places all around the Worship Center and will be ready to pray with and for you as the music plays. Step up to one of them, mention briefly what your request is – as the father did in John 4. And, they will anoint you with oil as James 5 speaks of. They will pray for you briefly. May we all experience, in a new way in these moments, the presence and power of our Lord Jesus.