

Today's Gospel lesson from the 9th chapter of John is a long one. 41 verses. The entire 9th chapter of John.

It tells of the healing of a man born blind. It is the 6th of 7 miraculous signs that Jesus does in the Gospel of John. It just so happens, that we're at the same point in John in our Parish Reading Project this Lent. We've thus encountered 6 of these 7 signs.

What are these miracles, these signs in John? And why does John use the word "sign" to talk about these 7 miracles.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke use a different term. They call such acts "deeds of power." Power in the New Testament is the word *dynamis*, like our English words dynamic or dynamo or dynamite. These deeds of power, these dynamic dynamite deeds are displays of power in and of themselves.

But John uses a different term: *semeion*, sign, something that points to something else. If you're driving down the road and you see a yellow sign with a curved arrow, you know that just ahead, the road is going to be curving. The sign is not the turn in the road itself. It points to the turn in the road. That's what signs do. They point to something else, something outside of themselves.

In John, these signs point to Jesus Christ, who he truly is. And many of these signs in John are followed up with a deeper exploration of who Jesus is revealed to be based upon these signs. More on that in a moment.

In John there are 7 signs explicitly mentioned. He says in several places that there were other signs too. But he only mentions 7 explicitly. Why?

Probably a couple of reasons. First off, for the Jewish people 7 is an important number, a number of perfection, of completeness.

Second, these 7 signs point to important aspects of who Jesus is and what his ministry is about.

The first sign is even before Jesus begins his ministry. He goes to a wedding in Cana. Jesus turns 6 stone jars of water into wine. In the OT abundant wine was part of the promise of the coming of the Messiah. And now, in John, the Messiah is here, and the wine flows.

Later we have a 2nd sign. A royal official asks Jesus to come and heal his son who is dying. Jesus tells him "Go (back), your son will live."¹ And when the man arrives home, he finds that his son was healed at the exact moment he was talking to Jesus. It is a sign that Jesus brings life. And it leads the official and his family to belief and new life.

¹ John 4:50

I'm going to skip over the 3rd sign for a minute, the healing of the lame man in John chapter 5. I'll come back to it in just a sec and talk about it in contrast with the 6th sign, the healing of the blind man in chapter 9, today's Gospel lesson.

In between are two signs. The 4th sign: Jesus feeds the 5,000. The 5th sign: Jesus walks on water later that night. And these signs are followed by extensive teaching about Jesus being the bread of life. It's one of the many "I am" statements:

I am the bread of life.

I am the Good Shepherd.

I am the Resurrection and the Life.

I'm going to deal with these "I am" statements next week, in the context of the 7th sign, the most spectacular sign, the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11.

So back to the 3rd and 6th signs I just mentioned? What about that contrast between the healing of the lame man in chapter 5 and the blind man in chapter 9?

We just heard the long story of the man born blind. Jesus tells him to wash in the pool of Siloam. And afterwards he can see. Amazing.

And we heard that his newfound physical sight leads to deeper spiritual sight and insight. At the end, he worships Jesus and says, "Lord, I believe."

But while he has gained physical and spiritual sight, there is simultaneous contrast between him and Jewish leaders. The formerly blind man is seeing more and more clearly spiritually. And at the same time the Jewish leaders are more and more blind to who Jesus is.

But then there's that healing of the lame man at the other pool, the pool of Bethesda in chapter 5.

In fact, after Jesus heals him, and he discovers who Jesus is, he goes to the authorities to snitch on Jesus. And Jesus has to come back to him and tell him, "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."²

So we have two different outcomes in these 2 signs. One man is led to greater faith in Jesus. And the other is not. The other ignores the deeper meaning of the sign.

One NT scholar sums up this theme in John by saying, "Seeing does not necessarily lead to believing. It's believing that leads to seeing and understanding about Jesus."³

And this is especially tough right now in the midst of a global pandemic.

If seeing is believing, what are we seeing? Anxiety? Worry? Fear? Panic? There's plenty of that all around us.

² Jn 5:14

³ Ben Witherington, "The Seven Signs in the Gospel of John"

And seeing these kinds of things does not necessarily lead to believing. Remember, believing in the New Testament sense is synonymous with trusting.

Does our world's anxiety and fear lead to trust? Not hardly. I think it feeds on itself. Anxiety leads to more anxiety. Fear begets fear. In this case seeing won't lead to believing.

But what if the reverse is true? What if that statement by that NT scholar is true? What if believing leads to seeing?

And believing is trusting. So to put it another way, what if trusting leads to seeing? What if trusting leads to true perspective?

That's at the heart of the Gospel of John. It's John's core theme that I've mentioned before:

"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name."⁴

Believe in Jesus. See who he really is. Let the signs point you toward the reality of his love and his presence.

And sign number 7 which we'll read about next week is all about Jesus raising Lazarus from death.

And you know, in John, there's really an extra 8th sign. Jesus himself is resurrected from the dead. That's what John wants us to believe in.

And believing in the Resurrected Jesus leads to truly seeing.

And trusting in Jesus leads to true perspective.

Death is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Death is temporary. Life in Jesus Christ is eternal. That's what we celebrate every Easter. That's what we celebrate every Sunday. That's what we proclaim every time we gather in this room and break the bread and share the cup. And that's what we're proclaiming today even when we can't be in this room together.

Jesus is the source of Resurrection and Life. And because of that we don't have to fear any pandemic. We don't have to fear stock market collapse. We don't have to fear anything that happens in this world.

Believing leads to seeing. Trusting leads to true perspective.

In the midst of difficult times, look to Jesus, crucified and risen. Look to Jesus who calls us to believe in him, and who calls us to put our trust in God's love.

⁴ Jn 20:30-31

These signs are written in John so that you may believe, and that by believing, by trusting, you may have life. Life without fear. Life with true perspective.

Believing is seeing.

Lord, help us to believe, to trust, to truly see.