

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups 18th May 2008

Being Witnesses with Jesus – in the town

John 4: 44 - 53

Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon In the preceding verses to our passage this morning we left Jesus with the unpopular or even hated, Samaritans, many of whom now believed in Him because of the words He spoke to them (John 4:39-42). We saw that God is not a tribal god that we see in many cultures but we see a God in the gospels who loves and saves people from every ethnicity. God is a God of inclusion and equality.

Jesus begins our narrative today leaving for Galilee and making a strange statement that, "*a prophet has no honor in His own country.*" The stories surrounding this statement are positive whereas the other gospels report the same comment, after His people have rejected Jesus. It is likely that John placed the saying here to contrast the fact that Jesus is rejected by His own (John 1:11) while accepted by prostitutes, sinners, Samaritans, etc. This miracle is Jesus 2nd in John and John's use of the story shows us that the true miracle in any of our lives is the one which forces us to see Christ as the prize, rather than the result of the miracle itself.


Jesus has returned to Cana, "*Where he turned the water into wine.*" At the heart of the Cana miracle is Jesus' desire to communicate that He is more than a miracle worker who gives good gifts, but He is the gift itself. Secondly, Jesus returns to Cana not Nazareth which is a place where He has limited honor (see John 4:44). He is known in Cana and honored for the work He had accomplished there. A "*certain royal official*" comes to ask him to come with him so that he could heal his son. We don't know much about this official, other than he worked for Herod Antipas who killed John the Baptist, whom Jesus called a "fox" (Luke 13:31). He's also racially mixed, with Edomite blood in him, but Jesus isn't about His own countrymen, but His mission to seek and save the lost of all tribes and people. The man's son was, "*Close to death.*" He is distraught with grief, and asks Jesus to heal his son. Clearly the official has a level of faith in Jesus as a healer and miracle worker. Jesus seems immediately to understand where the official is at with his faith and He wants to lead Him on, to help the man see beyond the miracle to seeing Jesus himself as a gift. He knows our needs before we know them and works to expose those needs so that we can know Him more clearly

"Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe" For many of us this statement may seem cold and uncaring, but in actual fact I think its quite the contrary. Jesus sees beyond this man's current grief and situation, to a deeper grief: the grief of his soul. This man is looking for the temporal goods - the instant success or miracle; in this case understandably – for which one of us would not ask Jesus for a miracle when our loved one is dying? But Jesus wants to provide us with eternal goods and not necessarily instant success. He is looking to help us learn that being with Him is an eternal relationship, far beyond the pains and ills of this world. Jesus is not against miracles or signs, but is rather more challenging humankind's myopic or narrow minded condition. The "you" in verse 48 is plural. Jesus is speaking for everyone to hear. God is not against giving us good gifts, but those gifts are to be enjoyed in a sort of juxtaposition to His greatest gift, which is Himself. Being with Jesus.... This official has already shown a degree of faith that this "miracle worker" Jesus can possibly save his dying son. His faith was, however, limited to Jesus' signs and wonders. He only knew that much about Jesus. Jesus wanted him to know more. When we are stuck in a purely signs and wonders movement, we are stuck to only know what God can do for us, and not necessarily to actually to know God.

Jesus forces him to trust His word. His servants who gave him the good news that his son was well and had started to recover around the 7th hour (1:00 p.m.), which was the time he was with Jesus. Jesus physical presence does not need to be there in order for healing or a miracle to take place. At this point something radical was happening in this man's life. He came as a believer, but left as something different. His "belief" was different. He no longer needed to see to believe, but he began to believe so that he could see. Jesus had changed him. "*Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see.*" Hebrew 11

"So that You May believe" (John 4:53-54) In other places in John's gospel we see Christ's miracles bringing forth belief (John 20:31). Jesus' desire to do miracles was never to pump up His ministry, but to help validate it so that many would believe.

The quest for instant miracles or success today often perpetuates the idea that God exists for us, instead of the other way around. God loves us and often provides us with miracles in the midst of our pain, but in reality, like this story, He is calling us beyond the signs to a saving faith that says, "I believe when I can't see." In this world, even when God does a miracle to save a dying relative, they will still ultimately die, which renders this life purposeless unless there is something more. Jesus opens up those doors so that we can rise above our condition and gather hope in the midst of pain.



Witness: questions to discuss

In what ways does humankind's myopic or narrow minded view of life prevent us from seeing beyond the immediate and instant reality to God's eternal perspective?

Discuss whether you think God exists for us or the other way round? Even if you think we exist for God, in what ways are you find yourself tempted to "dictate terms to God"?

Do you struggle with your faith, in terms of feeling you need to see a miracle or the "spectacular" before you can believe and have sincere faith?

In what ways can your faith be a witness to others even if your present reality is that God has not answered your prayers in the way you hoped for?

Spend time reflecting, perhaps open your hands to God and ask Him to give you more faith. If you struggle, remember that Jesus meets us in our struggles and wants to work through them with us – that's why he suggested the prayer "I believe – help me in my unbelief".

Perhaps you are praying now for a miracle for yourself or others, we are always called to pray. You might like to share this with the group and pray together...