

Sterling Sermon Guide
The Signs of Jesus: Is Healing More Than Healing?
Moses Falco, September 23, 2018, Church Retreat

The *Signs* of Jesus



How to use this guide

- The main purpose of this guide is to encourage groups and individuals to dig deeper into the topic of a sermon. This guide summarizes the sermon and provides discussion questions and suggestions of how to continue the conversation in order to apply the topic to real life.
- Listen to the sermon online (sterlingmennonite.ca) if you were not in church that Sunday or if you want to hear it again. If this sermon is not on the website, please contact our office.
- Re-read the scripture text and recommended reading.
- Select a leader in your group to guide your conversation and to lead you through this study.
- Use what is helpful for your group, but do not be bound by this guide. Let the Spirit lead you. You may be surprised where you end up.

The Signs of Jesus: Is Healing More Than Healing? Part 2 of a 6-part series

This guide was designed for our church retreat where we will be divided into several groups for study. Out of the eight signs of Jesus found in the Gospel of John, three of them have to do with physical healing. There is so much in these stories, and as we read them, something different may stand out to each of us. That is the beauty of community discernment and Bible study.

Each group will be assigned one healing story and then be asked to share some of their insights with the larger group. As you read and study together, may the Spirit lead you, and may you grow closer in your relationship with Christ through this witness of Jesus' life and work. If you are studying this as a single group, feel free to do this in three sessions (one for each sign).

As you prepare to share, think of these questions:

- a) Quickly summarize the story for us. What happened?
- b) Share some of your insights. What did you learn? What stood out?
- c) How is this story relevant to us today?

Introduction to Physical Healing

There are many difficult topics in the Bible that raise questions for us. Sometimes we may misuse knowledge or power in ways that are self-serving or that really do not help people grow in faith. Physical healing definitely falls into this category.

Perhaps what comes to mind for us are TV healers who have given people false hopes in order to make profit. Or maybe we are bothered by the message that somehow physical ailments are due to sin in our lives. Perhaps you have been told that in order to be healed, you just need to believe. If you are not healed, it's because you didn't have enough faith.

But maybe that's not our experience. Maybe you have experienced healing and blessing in a way that has strengthened your faith and given you hope. Maybe you have found a way to reason your way through the biblical stories. Maybe you see God's healing work everyday, believing that God works through medicine and our medical systems.

Either way, we have all experienced poor health (to different extents) and these stories are offered to us, through John, as a witness of who Jesus is.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Have you ever experienced physical healing in a way that leaves you to say that only God could have done that work?
- 2) How have you explained the stories of physical healing in the Bible?
- 3) What is your reaction when you hear other people's stories of physical healing in our time?

Whatever our experience, when it comes to the signs of Jesus, we must understand that there is more going on than simply healing. These stories are dynamic and complex, and in the end, are there to tell us something about Jesus and our relationship to Him. They, like all signs, are meant to point us to Jesus, the true Son of God.

Therefore, let us not let our experience or ideas about physical healing in our day take away from the stories of John and the experiences of the people who witnessed about Jesus. Even if we don't believe that God heals in the same way anymore, that does not mean that we need to explain away the experiences of people who experienced Jesus in His day.

For the people in Jesus' day, the healing was a sign to them that He was more than just a person, but that He was connected to the divine. This made some people believe, but others got upset and tried to kill Him because of it. Seeing signs does not mean that we will believe. Faith goes far deeper than just seeing signs. Since there is so much more going on in these stories than just the act of healing, we need to ask certain questions as we read these stories:

- a) What does this story tell us about Jesus?
- b) What does this story tell us about the person/people who experienced healing?
- c) What are the deeper questions that Jesus was trying to point out?
- d) How does this story address questions of faith?
- e) What happens around the story (wider context)? How did others react? How did this healing affect the life and ministry of Jesus?

The Healing of the Official's Son

Scripture Text: John 4:43-54

This is the second of the eight signs of Jesus found in the Gospel of John. By this time, Jesus has begun His ministry, already turned water into wine, had a long chat with Nicodemus about being born again, and broken cultural code by speaking with a Samaritan woman. Many have come to believe in Jesus already and the word is spreading about this man who can heal and do wonders.

Read John 4:43-47

We don't know much about the man and even less about the son. The man was an official who travelled from Capernaum to Cana (about 26 kilometres) to ask Jesus to come heal his son who was close to dying.

Discussion Questions

- 1) This man came to Jesus when it seemed like there was no other hope for his son. What does that say about Jesus' reputation? When people look at our lives and how Christ works through the church, does it cause people to come seek Christ as well?

Read John 4:48-50

The conversation between Jesus and the man is quite short. But right away, the first thing Jesus says hits a sore spot for His listeners and for us. But the man just wants Jesus to come, yet Jesus refuses. He does not go, He simply speaks. And the man left, taking Jesus at His word.

Discussion Questions

- 2) Why does Jesus seem disappointed that people only seem to believe after they see some kinds of signs and wonders? What might Jesus be trying to say about faith?
- 3) Jesus spoke a certain word to the man about his son. He did not offer to come, but just said that the boy would get well. How hard would it have been to walk away if you were the man?
- 4) One of the key statements for us is that the man took Jesus at His word. He left and went back home. That distance took time and He had to quite literally walk out in faith. What might this say to us about our call to faith and trust in Christ?
- 5) Has there been a time when you have had to walk out in faith, having just the words of Jesus to trust in?

Read John 4:51-54

The man goes back home and finds that his son was healed. As he looks back on what happened, he figures out that his son was healed when Jesus spoke healing to him.

Discussion Questions

- 6) Have you ever experienced God in such a way that it is only after you look back that you recognize how God has worked?
- 7) What might this man's experience tell us about our call to faith? Are we a people who need to see right now in order to believe? What does it mean to walk out in faith and take God at His word? How can we remember to look back in life to see how God has worked?

The Healing of the Man by the Pool

Scripture Text: John 5:1-15

This is the third of the eight signs of Jesus found in the Gospel of John. By this time, Jesus has begun His ministry, turned water into wine, talked to Nicodemus about being born again, broken cultural code by speaking with a Samaritan woman, and healed an official's son. Many have come to believe, but Jesus is starting to push the buttons of the religious leaders around Him. As He confronts them, He confronts the same kinds of ideas we wrestle with.

Read John 5:1-5

Jesus finds himself in Jerusalem by a pool that people believed could give them healing. It is near the Sheep Gate (where the sheep were brought to the temple for sacrifice). Jesus, the good shepherd and the eventual atoning sacrifice, shows up to people who were outcast. He finds one man who has been an invalid for 38 years. He was an invalid in the sense that he was not welcomed into the temple to participate in the religious system. He was unclean.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Think about this person's situation. For so long he has been rejected by his own people, an outcast because of a physical ailment. What does it mean that Jesus noticed him?

Read John 5:6-9

Jesus confronts the man and asks what seems to be an obvious question, but through it, reveals the state of the man's heart. He is broken and has lost hope. No one has even ever helped him to the pool. Then Jesus does the one thing that he has been waiting so long for.

Discussion Questions

- 2) The man does not even answer Jesus' question, but shows how hopeless he feels. Have you ever been in a situation where you were absolutely hopeless? Have you also experienced rejection from your own people? You may not have had a pool as a last resort, but what else do we turn to to find help and healing other than God?
- 3) Again, Jesus simply speaks and the man is healed. What does this say about Jesus? How does Jesus compare to some of our other sources of hope/lucky charms?

Read John 5:10-15

It seems like there was more going on here than just the healing. Jesus had other things in mind, and maybe that is why He told the man to pick up his mat. Right away, instead of rejoicing with the man, the religious leader point out that he should not carry a mat on the Sabbath. The Pharisees hedged the commandments of the law, creating law after law to make sure they didn't break the actual laws (over 1500 laws in total). Carrying a mat was therefore considered work.

Discussion Questions

- 4) What does the response of the religious leaders tell us about the state of the system in Jesus' day and how it treated the lowest of the low? How do we sometimes fall into those patterns?
- 5) If you still have time, read John 5:16-30. What is Jesus trying to get at with this confrontation with the religious leaders over the Sabbath? What is He saying about Himself?
- 6) Verse 14 contains problematic unclarity for some of us. How might we make sense of this? Could it be possible that this man was really this way because of sin? Do we ever suffer because of sin? Could this be what the man had or is Jesus getting at something else here?

The Healing of the Blind Man

Scripture Text: John 9:1-12

This is the sixth of the eight signs of Jesus found in the Gospel of John. By this time, Jesus has begun His ministry, turned water into wine, healed an official's son, fed over 5000 people with a boy's lunch, and walked on water through a storm. Many have come to believe, and Jesus continues to push the buttons of the religious leaders around Him. As He confronts them, He confronts the same kinds of ideas we wrestle with. In this case, spiritual blindness.

Read John 9:1-5

As Jesus and the disciples met a man who was born blind, the disciples ask a very logical question. Someone must have sinned for this to happen. Deuteronomy 7:12-16 gives us a bit of insight into why they would have thought this. Jesus tells them that this is not due to sin, but that God would be revealed through him.

Discussion Questions

- 1) How do we explain why bad things happen in the world? How do we figure out when something happens because of natural consequence and why other things simply happen without obvious reasons?
- 2) How is God displayed to us through difficult situations or through people who we may have discounted as being outsiders or unloved?

Read John 9:6-7

Jesus heals the man in a very unique way. It is the Sabbath and Jesus does two things that go against the law of the Pharisees. First, He makes mud, then He tells the man to wash, both things that would have been considered work and not allowed on the Sabbath. Not only does Jesus break the religious law, but makes the man do it as well.

Discussion Questions

- 3) What does this healing tell us of what Jesus believed about the law and about Himself?
- 4) What are the ways in which we prioritize religion over faith in Christ? What if we were called to do something out of faith that seems to go against our religious institutions?
- 5) How do we know which laws are of God and which laws are of man?

Read John 9:8-12

The man is healed. He has experienced the grace of God and as we see later, believed that Jesus is more than just a man. But right away, he is confronted about why he broke the law and who it was who told him to do such a thing.

Discussion Questions

- 6) Are there ways in which we stifle the faith of some because of our own ideas of what is right and wrong? How can we open ourselves to the experiences of Jesus in others?
- 7) The really exciting part of this story happens after the healing. If you have time, continue reading the rest of John chapter 9. What do we learn about the Pharisees? What do we learn about the blind man who was healed? What do we learn about Jesus and who He claims to be?
- 8) What is the spiritual blindness that Jesus is getting at? How can we learn to see?