

Your Son Will Live

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel of John, chapter 4, verses 46 to 54, as printed in the liturgy.

A reading from the Gospel according to John. Once more he visited Cana and Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum.

When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. Unless you people see signs and wonders, Jesus told him, you will never believe.

The royal official said, Sir, come down before my child dies. Go, Jesus replied. Your son will live. The man took Jesus at his word and departed.

[1 : 1 6] While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his 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. This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ. Good morning, Christ Church.

We are continuing in the gospel of John today. And I have to say that this passage is a hard passage to preach. Because if you're new with us, about 10 weeks ago, we lost Isaac Lee, a beloved son of Christ Church.

His first child we baptized in our church. A pillar in our youth group. We learned that he was sick. And some of you came.

[2 : 3 7] We gathered together to pray right up there. And we begged God to heal him. And he went to be with the Lord. And we've been grieving with his family, with his parents and his siblings.

And it's been tough for me to read the story this week about this healing of the sickness of the son that Jesus pulled back from the brink of death when our experience so recently in our church was just so different.

So Brian and Sam know this. I hope Jack and Juliet know it. I hope all of you know it. That that's the tension in my heart. The grief that I bring very close to my heart as I read and preach this text today.

And I hope to circle back to that tension and that grief at the end of the sermon. But I want to ask, you know, why did John give us this story in his gospel anyway?

The Gospel of John is a book about faith. And we assume that the Apostle John had been asked many, many times, you know, what is the Christian faith?

[3 : 43] What is the path to faith? And out of his vast catalog of files that he had on Jesus, John gathered together the stories that are in this little booklet that he wrote to answer many of the questions that we have about faith.

John gathers together stories from people who were there at the Jordan River when Jesus underwent baptism and began to call his first disciples. He went and gathered the stories of the people who were at that wedding in Cana where Jesus turned the water into wine.

And he talked to the people and interviewed the folks who were there in Jerusalem at the temple when Jesus cleared it out. And he said, you know, I am now the meeting place between God and his people.

He went and interviewed Nicodemus and his family and his students. And he asked them more. What did Jesus mean when he said he was the one to bring the new birth from above by the Holy Spirit?

He went and talked to that woman in Samaria and her whole village that came to discover Jesus as the living water and the Savior of the world. That's why he's put all these stories in this little booklet for us.

[4 : 55] And he actually tells us this at the end of the book. If you want to turn to John 20, John chapter 20, verse 30, he tells us the point of writing this book.

He says, Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these signs are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

So this is a book about belief. It's a book about faith and the eternal life that comes through faith in Jesus. And of all the stories that John had on file, why did he choose this one about the healing of the official son?

Well, you'll notice that that word belief occurs three times here. In verse 48, Jesus talks about how you will never believe. Verse 50, it says the man took Jesus at his word.

Or in the Greek, it says he believed Jesus' word. And then in verse 53, it says, so he and his whole household believed. The story was written down for us and our questions as a signpost pointing us to what real faith, deep faith, life-saving, life-giving faith is all about.

[6 : 14] And so what I want to talk about a little bit this morning is how Jesus challenges our faith, gives us his word, and heals our bodies.

That's what I think this story is about. That Jesus challenges our faith, gives us his word, and heals our bodies. Let's think for a minute about how Jesus challenges our faith.

This is an urgent moment. This young man is sick. He's close to death. The doctors say it's hopeless. And agony, powerlessness, and desperation has settled in upon his family and his friends.

And yet there is this glimmer of hope because it's reported that Jesus is back from the Passover at Jerusalem. And everybody's talking about his power.

And so hearing this news, the boy's father takes courage. He takes action because there's not a moment to lose. Life-giving faith starts with reason.

[7 : 28] It starts with our minds. It starts with thinking and our rationality. Why did this guy go to Jesus? Because he had heard the reports about Jesus. We didn't print this verse, but it says in verse 45, When Jesus arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him.

They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover festival, for they also had been there. And once more, he, Jesus, visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine.

So Jesus is doing wonderful works, mighty deeds, public miracles, and the word is beginning to spread. Perhaps even people that this man knew and trusted, they're saying, we've seen Jesus with our own eyes.

And this man would not have gone to Jesus unless he had heard and weighed the evidence of those reports. So I want to say today that faith moves beyond reason, but faith always starts with reason.

Most of the things that we believe, we take on the authority of other people. We believe the authority of reports from historians and scientists and sociologists and psychologists and journalists, and maybe even our uncle posting on Facebook.

[8 : 44] But that's, you know, we have to sift through all these things. We have to sift through these reports with our reason to see if they're reliable, to see if they're believable.

Maybe our uncle posting on Facebook isn't somebody worth listening to after all. But that's why we go through the Gospels on a regular basis, because we want you to be able to hear directly from these eyewitnesses and weigh the reports and decide for yourself whether or not they're trustworthy.

And that's what this guy does. He takes the first baby step of faith based on those reports, and he goes to Jesus. But Jesus, of course, wants more than that.

And so we hear him say in verse 48, unless you people see signs and wonders, you will never believe. Now, I'm 100% confident that none of us would like Jesus and the apostles as much as we think we would like them, right?

Because of stuff like this. They're constantly saying things that are off-putting, that disturb us and make us uncomfortable and maybe even offend us.

[9 : 55] No writer of fiction that's aware of Jesus' compassion would come up with this sharp rejoinder that seems harsh and maybe even cruel, because here's this desperate man in agony, and he's begging, please come and heal my dear son who's dying.

Why does Jesus respond to his first baby step of faith like this? Well, first of all, Jesus says you, plural, not singular, which kind of softens the blow.

He says you all, y'all, you people are all the same unless you see, you'll never really believe. And Jesus is not here against the need for proper and substantial evidence to be presented to our rational mind.

He's not saying you just need to be persuaded without any facts, because we're told in verse 54 that this was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Jesus knows that we need signs, and that's why he gives us signs. So what is Jesus challenging here? I think he's challenging superficiality. I think he's challenging shallow, surface-level faith.

[11 : 13] Think to Jesus teaching on the parable of the sower, and he talks about how those seeds are scattered in that second type of soil, and what happens is they sprout up quickly, and it seems like faith, but there are actually no roots.

There's no depth. It's not gone to the inmost heart. It's shallow. And so Jesus says when the heat comes, when the trouble comes, that shallow faith becomes scorched and withered and falls away because it has no roots, and therefore it can bear no fruit.

And Jesus there in his teaching is helping us distinguish between superficial faith and deep faith, between temporary faith and lasting faith. And I think what he's saying to this guy in verse 48 is, have you come to me because you think that I'm just a conduit of power that responds to foxhole prayers?

Do you think I'm a Messiah who just performs on-demand miracles? Have you come to use my supernatural power to get what you want and what will benefit you?

Or do you want me? Do you want a relationship with me whether I heal your son or not? See, Jesus is saying, I want a belief.

[12 : 36] I want a faith that's not about the signs and not about what I can do for you. I want a belief and a faith that moves toward what all the signs are pointing to, namely, me.

This is challenging, isn't it? Jesus is saying, I don't just want to physically heal your son, I want to spiritually heal you. And it's a massive challenge.

It's a massive test. He's drawing this guy out. He's seeing what's in his heart. And what comes out of his heart next is absolutely amazing. Verse 49, the royal official said, Sir, sir, come down before my child dies.

Sir, he's respectful. He's humble. Come down, please. He's dogged and persistent. He prayed once and Jesus put him off.

And so he doesn't stop praying. He keeps praying persistently, coming back. That's his second step of faith. And I wonder if you're ready today wherever you're coming from to take that first baby step of faith, to just look directly at the evidence for yourself, to weigh these reports about Jesus.

[13 : 52] If you've never done that, we're so glad that you're here. And we would invite you to come on Wednesday nights to Christianity Explored. We're looking at the Gospel of Mark. It's a gospel.

You can read it in about 45 minutes over a cup of coffee. And we're reading it, asking questions, watching videos, engaging discussions about it. If you can't join us on Wednesday nights, we encourage you to join in to our daily Bible reading plan in the Gospel of John and just see for yourself whether this eyewitness testimony about Jesus is reliable, trustworthy, and believable.

But if you've taken that first baby step of faith, then are you ready to take that second baby step of faith, to move beyond superficial interest in Jesus and going to Jesus only for the benefits that he gives you?

Maybe some of you have said, you know, I tried to pray once and it didn't work, so I stopped. Or I went to Jesus and I didn't really like what he said back, so I quit going. Are you willing to wrestle with Jesus like this man?

Are you willing to invest in having a relationship with Jesus even when he doesn't engage on your terms or say the things you want him to say or play by your rules?

[15 : 10] That's the second step of life-giving faith. You guys with me so far? Jesus is challenging.

And Jesus challenges our faith. But more than that, Jesus not only challenges our faith, he gives us his word. He gives us his word.

How does Jesus respond to this man's second prayer request? Well, he tells him in verse 50, go, your son will live. Now we know more than this man knows, but this is actually a higher challenge than the first challenge that Jesus gave.

Because this man says, please Jesus, come with me because you need to be physically present to bring healing. And if you're not there, then there's no hope.

And Jesus makes this astounding, astonishing claim. He says, you know, I don't need to go with you because I'm so powerful that I don't even need to be there.

[16 : 12] I can just heal with a word. And I give you my word. I give you my word of honor. I promise that I'll do it. Who else can claim that kind of ability and authority to give life?

Who can heal disease and save from death at a distance and with only a word? I would say only God.

Only God can do that. Only the God who says, let there be light and there was light. Only the God who has light-making power in his word. And that's what Jesus is claiming here.

He's claiming creator-like, life-giving power. You don't need my physical presence to experience my power. I can heal my sick, sinful, broken, dying creatures that I created from anywhere with a word.

Now you gotta remember that John is writing his gospel to people who can't see Jesus. Jesus is resurrected and he's ascended into heaven and people around John are saying, how can we put our faith in Jesus?

[17 : 21] How can we put our trust in a Jesus that we cannot see? And this story is here to tell us that we don't need to have the physical presence of Jesus to become a believer.

what we need is the word of Christ. And we have many of the words of Christ in our Bibles. Right?

The question is, do we read them? Do we even know them? And then, if we know them, will we believe them?

And will we trust these promises and will we obey these commands? That's what faith is about. Jesus challenges and he tests this man a second time and basically he's saying to himself, okay, if Jesus can't do what he just said he can do, if he does not have the power that no one else has ever claimed to have, then my son has no hope.

So am I going to trust my present and my future? Am I going to trust my son's life to this incredible claim of Jesus that he's the life giver? Remember, imagine, imagine the scene where he to arrive home and his wife and his servants are like, where's the healer?

[18 : 41] You had one job. Where's the healer? I mean, if he goes home with only a word of promise, how foolish is he going to look in the eyes of everybody in his household and in his village?

And how many of us are super excited to look like a fool in the eyes of others? But friends, that's what faith is about. Faith means taking the risk of looking foolish.

And that's the risk he takes. In verse 50, it says, the man took Jesus at his word and departed. The man believed Jesus' word and he went home.

That's the third baby step of faith. Faith is taking Jesus at his word and then living your life according to it. He acts.

He moves. Jesus speaks and he begins to walk home. Faith is going each morning to Jesus' teachings, to his words, to his promises, to his commands and saying to ourselves, these are going to be the very words by which I live my life.

[20 : 03] And when you do that, you know that like this man, you're moving from rationalistic belief that Jesus exists to a personal trust in Jesus.

You're moving from intellectual assent that Jesus has power to actually entrusting the details of your life to him. Right? You're moving from knowing about Jesus to staking your life on Jesus.

Does that make sense? You're moving from saying, okay, that chair will probably hold me up if I took the risk to sit down in it to actually going over and putting the full weight of your life on that chair and maybe it won't hold you up.

Maybe you'll fall down. Maybe you'll look like a fool or maybe you won't. That's what faith is all about. There are many, many nominal Christians, right?

And nominal Christians believe some of the stuff that they like in Christianity, kind of conveniently they pick out the things that sort of fit with what they already believed, but they're not actually trusting their life to Jesus.

[21 : 14] Tons and tons of people believe in Jesus, but what do they trust? They trust their money. They trust themselves. They trust a whole host of things other than Jesus and Jesus is saying, I want you to trust your whole life to my claims and to my words and to my promises.

And when this man puts Christ's word to the test and he found the result that Jesus is the one who gives life, it pushed him all the way to that fourth baby step of faith and he became a convinced and convicted believer with his whole household it says.

So are you ready today to take that third baby step of faith where you don't just say that you believe in Jesus but you actually listen to his words every day, that you make it a priority.

First thing in the morning to chew and to digest his words and then to ask God help me believe these words in such a way that I change my life according to them no matter how foolish that might make me seem in the eyes of others.

Jesus will kind of say this again at the end of the gospel when he's talking to doubting Thomas in John 20 and he says Thomas blessed are those who have not seen and yet who have believed on the basis of my word on the basis of the testimony and the word about me blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

[22 : 59] Jesus challenges our faith he gives us his word and lastly he heals our bodies Jesus heals our bodies here he is in Cana and he says to this father go home to Capernaum there's nothing to fear your son lives the time is about one o'clock in the afternoon in the blazing heat in the middle of the day it's so hot back at this man's home that his wife we're sure is working furiously to help bring down the raging fever that's about to take the life of her son the sun is scorching their little house is boiling there's no air conditioning there's no bathtub there's no running water mom keeps going back and forth to get more water to bring his temperature down and she goes out one more time and she comes back and amazingly he's completely and instantly healthy 98.6 degrees and she is amazed and so she sends her servants to her husband with the glorious news that her son is perfectly well and the man begins to cross examine the servants saying well when did he recover and they're like well we think it was about one o'clock in the afternoon yesterday in the heat of the day and the man thinks that's when

Jesus gave me his word of promise verse 53 then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him your son will live and so he and his whole household believed he now has taken that fourth baby step to a conviction he's convinced that Jesus gives life and so he has to share that conviction with all who are near and dear with him in his household and in his village who also come to believe the thing that's been on my heart all week as I've been thinking about this healing is that there were many in Israel with sick bodies that Jesus did not heal I think of Jairus' daughter Jairus was the synagogue ruler he was the father of a 12 year old daughter who was also dying he comes and he desperately begs

Jesus to come and to heal and if you know the story Jesus delays and because Jesus delays this daughter like many others died but Jesus says to this man to Jairus he says do not be afraid just believe now anyone who says that is either spectacularly misguided or is supremely confident in his own power and authority don't be afraid just believe and Jesus will show this particular grief stricken family his power over death when he says to her little girl rise up and he takes her the hand of her corpse and he wakes her up like she's been in a nap the same thing happens with Jesus good buddy Lazarus he gets this urgent message Lord the one you love so much is sick and what does

Jesus do he delays he delays again and his friend dies and these bewildered sisters say to Jesus Lord if only you'd been here our brother would not have died and when Jesus sees their tears he begins to weep too why because I think he's looking around at all the people he's not going to heal all the people whose bodies he's not going to raise up I think he's looking down the corridors of time through the centuries to all of our tombs all of our funerals all the bodies of his beloved people he's looking he cannot hold back his own tears because he's looking at all of his loved ones who are going to lose their loved ones but Jesus in that moment he gives this particular grief stricken family a sign that he has the power over death and so

Lazarus come out you see Jesus when this father came to Jesus Jesus did not come on the father's terms but he did decide for whatever reason to heal his son and yet in these other stories Jesus did not come immediately when Jairus said it's urgent when Mary and Martha said please Lord come it's urgent Jesus did not come he delayed and people died many of you know that this happened to my mom my mom got sick when I was 19 years old and that was the first major problem of my life and like this man I went to Jesus many of us many many people went to Jesus and we begged Jesus we said please Lord come for she's she's gonna die please heal her and for whatever reason

[28 : 42] Jesus chose not to do things on our terms he delayed and she died at the age of 50 right I'm gonna blink and be 50 when Isaac got sick we came together and we said Lord Jesus please we're begging you please heal this beloved young man and for whatever reason Jesus chose not to do that and he delayed and Isaac died at the age of 16 and so I want to say that it's so right for us to ask the healer for healing when we need healing have any of you ever known people who've been healed by Jesus anybody asked for healing we got too many Presbyterians in here we okay a few I see a few Pentecostals and I pray okay hands are coming up wow okay um yeah we need we need more of that but think about it this man's son who

Jesus healed he eventually died and Jairus his daughter would die again Lazarus would die again all of us we might experience healing but we're gonna die we're gonna die maybe when we're young Jesus in every case for all of us he's gonna delay his coming that could save us from death but we know we know that Jesus has given us his word that he has the power over sickness and death that he is the one who gives healing and life and we very much are like this father whom Jesus sends back on his anguished way to walk 20 miles back home on that lonely road by himself with only Jesus word that he has life in the face of death and that's how we're called to live it looks foolish it looks beyond the bounds of possibility but we know more than this man knew because we have the final sign that Jesus gave us at the end of this gospel that we're going to talk about on Easter

Sunday in John chapter 20 it says that very early on that third morning after Jesus own death the son of God died but very early on that third morning after his death Jesus rose up in the darkness of night in the power of an endless life so friends at present Jesus sometimes and often times he doesn't respond on our terms and Jesus probably for every one of us is going to delay his coming that would prevent us from death but make no mistake for those of us who believe all of his life giving power is going to come to us in the end he will heal our bodies he will raise us up to indestructible life he will make all things new that is what all these signs of healing all these signs of resurrection are pointing us to it's how

John begins his gospel in John 1 4 he says in Jesus was life and that life was the light of all people the life that's in Jesus is the hope of the world I want to leave you with this famous passage in the Bible about God's people who live by faith and this wonderful definition of faith Hebrews 11 you ready for it it says now faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things we cannot see now faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen and after going through example after example after example of people who live by faith it says this all these people were still living by faith when they died they did not receive the things promised they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance admitting that they were foreigners strangers and strangers on earth and that's the question for us will we have this kind of assured and convicted faith even in the face of certain death a faith that sees that coming day in the future when Jesus will heal and resurrect our bodies to be like his body that's what it means to be a

Christian that's what it means to be a church that's what it means to live by faith may it be so among us in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen