

John 4:46-54; Feb 8, 2026

### **Belief and Certainty**

Have you ever had a sick kid? Like really ill? If you are not a parent, have you ever been around a really sick child? Sick to where the normally energetic lively child that is usually running around wreaking havoc is just the opposite. They just lie there, lethargic, not a sound, barely a movement in contrast to their usual active self.

When I first became a parent about 29 years ago I have some memory of my daughter Paige being really ill for the first time. I remember we took her to the doctor, twice I think, and they told us this flu, or whatever it was, will just have to run its course, and if the fever won't stay down with the children's tylenol then we should call, or if it wasn't getting better in a few days we should call. I remember looking down at her weak, ill body, and bending down and feeling her wheezing breath, too hot against my cheek. The poor thing has no idea what's going on, I thought. If only I could be ill in her place. And she would be up and running around the house. "God please! Let me be sick instead of her!"

In our Scripture today, we are back in Cana again. You may remember a few weeks ago at a wedding Jesus' first miracle or "Sign" as John calls it, happened. Water turned to wine. Good wine, and plenty for all. A sign of God's economy. Since that time Jesus has been travelling around between Jerusalem and Judea, through Samaria and back to Galilee, essentially having conversations with people. Clears the temple. That brings some conversation! Nicodemus. The woman at the well. And in our text today he is back again in the village of Cana in Galilee. And there, he encounters a man with a sick kid. A really sick kid. I am calling him a kid, although we really don't know the age of his son...

So sick, in fact, that he was about to die. Not because this man was poor or uneducated or without access to the best healthcare. He was probably a royal official for the Romans, a gentile who likely served as a governor over the region. Here was this man with status, with power, with influence, a

great career, a man with *answers* for every situation. The Romans had answers to a lot of things. But not when it came to this.

There was no Tylenol or Ibuprofen to bring that fever down, no throat swabs and lab testing to determine the cause of this illness, and no real understanding of how illness works in different bodily systems. While we're not told, it seems likely that he would have already consulted the best healers that Rome had to offer, and they had maybe seen to the care of his son and said "I'm sorry, there's nothing more we can do". "But I'm the governor, for crying out loud, surely there is something that can be done to help my son?"

Suddenly—or slowly, he is faced with the creeping reality that all of his influence, his wealth, his career that he has worked so hard to build is being reduced to nothing, useless to help him to bring his child back from the brink of death.

"I'm gonna go get this Jesus dude," he may have told his household, "this Jewish rabbi, this teacher, that people have been talking about. Maybe he can do something. Being a government official he would have kept up on the latest things people were talking about. It was rumored that the guy was a guest at a wedding, and when they ran out of wine he had made some more out of water. He spoke of things most folks could relate to, but couldn't quite get their heads around—and yet somehow people seem to come away from him with encouraged and optimistic. Well he could use a taste of optimism right about now, with his child lying there inching closer and closer to death.

And he finds Jesus, and pleads with him "please, come heal my son who is ill and dying!" Jesus responds in verse 48 "You won't have faith unless you see miracles and wonders! I don't know about you, but this answer seems a little short on compassion coming from Jesus. Biblical commentator Rolf Jacobsen says "you" is better translated in the plural as "you'all" , and this statement from Jesus may be better translated like in the

dramatized reading that Nathaniel and Celia did—as a question “will you have faith without seeing miracles and wonders?”

Combine repair story...

Most of us DO want to see signs before we believe! And modern farm machinery, as complicated as it can be, are not nearly as complicated as us human beings. You add in emotions, our will, our experience, personalities etc...

The man, this powerful man who has been reduced from his place of prominence—to begging for healing for his son—says, “yeah—I don’t know about all of that—I just know my son is about to die. Can you help me out, or not? Will you just come before my son dies?

I remember the day all too well when Stephanie and I went to a prenatal appointment, full of delight and joy at the possibility of parenting a child together. We were in our early 40’s and the biological clock was ticking, as they say. We waited, fully expecting to hear the heartbeat again like we’d heard so strong and real already at the previous appointment. But as we waited, the bubbly and happy sono-tech got quieter and quieter and kept moving around trying to find the heartbeat and we noticed her facial expression growing more and more concerned. She never found it.

It was the longest walk ever down that long hallway that connects the clinic to the NMC hospital where we went for a more extensive sonogram. “Please, please tell us that it’s there!” Maybe the sono device at the doctor’s office was busted. It wasn’t. “Can you please just check again?” we begged. The words “I’m sorry, there’s nothing we can do. There’s no heartbeat. You have had a miscarriage” I’m sure were said with great compassion, yet they hit us like a gut punch.

If any of you or someone you are near to has ever experienced a loss like this, or suddenly experiences a major health crisis, an accident, a shattering diagnosis that changes your life forever, or a disorder of the brain, then you may well know the feeling of all of your resources seeming

so limited, and you are reduced to almost begging someone to heal you or your loved one..as you recognize that your well-being and the well-being of the person that you love is beyond your control. Or anyone's control for that matter.

And like this official travelling halfway across Galilee, maybe you were, or are reduced to travelling halfway across the state of Kansas, or Wichita, or the country to try to find healing. Thrust headlong into uncertainty. Suddenly things that seemed so important seem not so important at all. No answers. Only questions. And waiting.

Jesus then says simply to this desperate man, “Go on home, your son will live.” And we’re told the man *believed the word* that Jesus spoke to him and started for home. It was a long walk. A long walk, full of uncertainty. What would he find when he got home? Would his son be alive or dead? We wrestle with the same as we head to see a specialist who may be able to help us with a life threatening disease, or the debilitating condition, or the injury. Or the heartbeat that can’t be found.

This man did not know what the outcome would be. But John tells us, he *believed* in Jesus. And he started off.

Isn’t that what we have to do in these moments of crisis that we all encounter sooner or later in life? In our greatest moments of need, with hearts torn open, we hear God’s reassuring words of promise in our time of crisis or great need, we believe, and we set off, we walk. We set off, not knowing.

We don’t know what this Roman governor was thinking on that long walk home. I can imagine things like why hadn’t he insisted that Jesus come with him? What am I going to tell my family when I show up back home with nothing but faith in a “go, your son will live” statement from Jesus? What if he’s dead already?

It seems this man, this powerful man who has been reduced to nothing, was for the first time feeling the poverty of genuine helplessness. Perhaps

this encounter with God, or a higher power—in this helpless moment of suffering and desperation something is ***changing in him***. That his long walk across Galilee to Capernaum was a little less desperate than his earlier walk to find Jesus; perhaps he found himself breathing deeper, and for the first time since his child had fallen ill, or maybe ever, he experienced a faint sliver of God's peace in the midst of this desperate experience. Maybe he stopped and got a cool drink of water and bought himself something to eat.

And as he continued on his journey home the question of hope and healing and courage to face life with all its joys and sorrows became not only about if his son would live or die—even though he still so badly wanted him to live. But in the place of sheer desperation, the desperation that may cause us to forget to eat or drink or go to the bathroom—there was a new calm, a tiny seedling of hope that had sprouted in his heart that would endure in him even if he has to bury his son. “All will be well. And all will be well, all manner of things will be well...” St Theresa of Avila. Hope that has something to do with, or everything to do with, recognizing the frailty of our human bodies and our human condition that we all encounter sooner or later, and finding our humanity and solidarity with others who have walked this same road of suffering and loss. And healing and joy!

Jesus gives him no guarantees or certainty. And we today are given none. Sometimes we pray earnestly for healing and our child or our parent or our friend or our spouse doesn't make it. Or the healing we so desire doesn't happen. The person we love still suffers from the same chronic disease or disorder of the brain. Or the cancer returns. Or the heartbeat is no longer. Or our earnest prayers of longing to be able to bear a child into the world seem to bounce off the ceiling.

Ah, but maybe this is what the Apostle Paul is referring to when he says “we grieve, not as those without hope”, those words often spoken as we lay someone to rest. In our suffering, this great universal equalizer, we find our common humanity.

The Scripture story ends with his servants rushing out to meet him on the road to tell him that his son has recovered! When? About 1 o'clock yesterday afternoon—about the time this man had set off for home after his encounter with Jesus. Sometimes healing comes in amazing ways. A miracle, a sign that reassures us that our great and infinite God is affected by our suffering—indeed is suffering right along with us.

My daughter Paige recovered just fine from her bad case of the flu and was soon running around the house while her mom and I lay around sick from the illness that she had no doubt picked up at preschool. I had prayed that I would be sick instead of her, so I guess I got what I asked for!

And though Steph and I suffered a painful miscarriage, and still experience the loss every time we water the hydrangea we planted by the shed in our back yard in memory, we were able to get pregnant again and now we have Eli!

I don't know what suffering and loss and healing stories you bring with you to church today. I know a few of them. There are probably as many stories of gut-wrenching loss, and healing miracles as there are people in this space. We all have a unique story.

Like the man who comes to God looking for healing, will you, in the poverty of heart that you may be experiencing right now, hear these words metaphorically or otherwise, "Go, your son will live"? Will you, like this man, believe, and set off? Will you hear the reassurance along the way that God will never leave you or forsake you, and that the creator of the Universe suffers right along with us? I came so that you may have life, life to the fullest! Jesus will say later in John chapter 10. Live! Will you let your breathing deepen, let hope spring up inside and carry you forward in new ways and old ways? And will you let others walk with you, weeping and celebrating the healing as it comes?

May it be so, God. May it be so..