

There's this story about the 3 men who were out fishing one day & caught a mermaid... The mermaid said she would grant them each a wish if they would let her go...

So the 1st man said, "make me twice as smart as I already am..." The mermaid said, your wish is granted & immediately the man started quoting Shakespeare & had this extreme insight... The 2nd man said, "make be 3 times smarter than I already am..." The mermaid said, your wish is granted & immediately the man started quoting all these mathematical equations & explaining physics & chemistry...

Finally, the 3rd man said, "make me 5 times smarter than I already am..." The mermaid said, I'm not sure you know what you're asking me to do – are you sure you want me to do that... The man insisted, that's what he wants... So the mermaid said, your wish is granted – AND SHE TURNED HIM INTO A WOMAN!

You know when you tell someone a joke there are a number of reactions. Some people love what you have said and quickly tell another. Others are offended. Others still are bored for they have heard it before. Interesting isn't it, that there can be different reactions to a story.

And when we turn to the next part of John's gospel, we see two healings, two miraculous healings, two signs if you like of Jesus power. But once again there are different reactions. Why? Because the signs that Jesus performed were to uncover what was going on inside's people's heart. They were to reveal a response. So lets look at the end of chapter 4 and see the first response... that of **1. Reliance.**

Well Jesus is back in Cana, in chapter 4 verse 46, where he changed the water into wine. And there's a Royal official, whose little boy is on his deathbed 25 kilometres down the hilly road in Capernaum.

And let me tell you, it doesn't matter how royal you are or how rich you are when your kid's sick and there's nothing you can do about it. And so when this Royal Official hears Jesus is back in town, he's there in a flash. Begging him to come down to Capernaum and *heal his son*. Who John says at the end of verse 47 is *close to death*.

When this guy left home to come to Jesus, my guess is he thought he was saying his *last goodbye* to his sick little boy. He's been around all the specialists, he's tried all the naturopaths... there's nothing to lose. So this *Royal official* humbles himself... before Jesus. And *begs him*. To come and heal his son.

Now I don't think this guy is coming to Jesus out of faith, he's coming out of desperation. It's the last throw the dice. And Jesus picks up on this 7 that is why he says in v. 48 "*unless you see miraculous signs 7 wonders you won't believe.*" For since Jesus started doing miracles he has been surrounded by those who just want a touch from God. Who want their curiosities satisfied, who want something from Him.

So Jesus comment about signs, I believe is to see if this man is just like all the rest. But he isn't. He isn't play acting, this is for real. "*Sir, come before my child dies.*"

Anyone who has had children knows where this official is coming from, don't you? He would do

anything for this child to live. And Jesus is his last hope. So how does Jesus respond? Does he care? Will he turn a desperate father away? “*You may go. Your child will live.*”

Jesus heals this man’s son, immediately, as he will find out the next day, with just a word. But this healing is also a sign that will point those who hear of it along the pathway to increased faith. For the nobleman thought that Jesus would have to come to Capernaum with him to save the boy, but he will learn that Jesus doesn’t have to be there physically with his boy to heal him. No one is out of His reach. Jesus does not have limitations. He is the God of space and distance. There is nothing that is too hard for Him. There is no distance that is too great for Him. And believed that and acting on that is called faith.

And that is what the nobleman does, isn’t it? Verse 50 says he took Jesus at his word. And heads back home. See, it’s interesting. I reckon that Dad as he walks away with the words of Jesus ringing in his ears, I reckon *he’s the picture, of the life of faith.*

Its not waiting for some sort of sign that God will give you that will turn you into a super faithful Christian. Its not an emotional feeling of being loved or accepted or forgiven. The life of faith is about *trusting someone’s word.* Trusting God’s word.

God doesn’t prove Himself by jumping through our hoops. God doesn’t always answer our prayers the way we want him to answer them. He wants us to trust Him even when it seems He has done nothing. He wants us to believe in Him even when He doesn’t give us what we want. He wants us to rely on His word.

Now that’s hard to trust today isn’t it? We are taught to stand on our own two feet. We are told that if you want something done well you have to do it yourself. And yet Jesus says have faith in me. For your eternal salvation. He says rely on my word for that is the best way to live. He says be like that father, walk through life, not really knowing what will happen when you get home. But knowing that you have a loving, heavenly father, who promises that all things work for good for those who love me. So trust in me, rely upon me. Have faith.

2. Reason. But not everyone will do that. Some will see the same sort of sign and not rely, they will reason. Look at our next story in chapter 5. Jesus is back in Jerusalem; for another *feast of the Jews*. It’s the Sabbath day. And John tells us that Jesus is in the corner of Jerusalem that’s kind of like the *sale yards*. It’s near the *sheep gate*; and just up from the Sheep Gate there’s a pool.

A kind of a *mineral spa...* with *legendary healing powers*. A bit like the River Ganges in India, where every January there are thousands of Pilgrims; all desperate to be *healed*. All desperate to *bathe* in the sacred waters of the Ganges. Well the Pool of Bethesda has got the same sort of reputation. You see Bethesda means *house of mercy*. And there are dozens of *invalids*. Desperate for some *mercy*.

And out of all the invalids that are there, Jesus hears of one who has been there a long time, 38 years in fact. Now they reckon waiting times at the Tweed Hospital are bad. But this is a *lifetime*. And Jesus goes to him and asks him *do you want to get well?*

A strange question isn’t it? Of course he wants to get better, doesn’t he? Well he doesn’t answer Jesus question, he just reasons with Jesus, in fact he whinges with Jesus. “I’ve got no one to help me. There’s no one who cares. Whenever the waters are stirred up, some one gets in first, because by myself I’m just not quick enough. Its not my fault that I’m still sick, its everyone else’s.”

Now you may think I'm being a bit hard on this man, but John's portrait of him is not very favourable. Here in verse 7 he whinges. When he is healed, he doesn't bother to find out Jesus name. When he is caught carrying his mat on the Sabbath, he blames his healer and when Jesus catches up with him some time later, he immediately goes and dubs him in. He's not the nicest of human beings, so is there any hope for him?

Years ago an S-4 submarine was rammed by a ship off the coast of Massachusetts. It sank immediately. The entire crew was trapped in a prison house of death. Now every effort was made to rescue the crew, but all ultimately failed. But near the end of the ordeal, a deep-sea diver, thought he heard a tapping on the steel wall of the sunken sub. He placed his helmet up against the vessel and he realized it was Morse Code. He listened and spelt out in his mind the message being tapped from within. The question was: "Is there any hope?"

Is there any hope for a guy like that? Physically an invalid for 38 years. Mentally, crotchety. Spiritually, in apparent darkness? Yes with Jesus there is always hope. For Jesus heals him with just a word. *Rise. Get up. Pick up your mat and walk.* Jesus takes away his physical complaint. Jesus steps into his life. He gives him a new start.

But there is no thankfulness. No following. No faith. Sure he does what he is told, but when he finds himself in trouble, he is back blaming Jesus as he once blamed others. For friends, feeling a touch of God, having a miraculous healing, receiving a spiritual experience is no guarantee of faith.

I've heard many examples of people who have been healed of an illness and they show no gratitude to the Great Physician. Of men and women who will tell me of a spiritual experience that they had which has been nothing short of truly miraculous but it has not changed their life one iota. Who talk about the presence of God, even of God speaking to them and yet there is no evidence that they now rely on His word. They are just chasing the next vision, the next experience, the next touch of God. And they miss out on moving forward in the walk of faith.

3. Religion One response is reliance, another is reason, still another is religion. For when this invalid is cured and is told to pick up his mat and walk, he happens to meet some legalistic Jews who point out to this man, that carrying your mat on a Sabbath is a real no no. *For* according to the Pharisee's rules for the Sabbath Day, it's a day for *resting*. And the rules for *resting* are clearly set down in something like Subsection 27 paragraph 14 clause *b* in the Pharisee's Religious Rule Book.

And so when the Jews see this guy who's been healed after 38 years as an invalid, and he's walking and carrying his bed roll, they don't say to him, that's *great news* you've been healed. They say, what do you think you're doing *carrying your bed* on the *Sabbath*. That's covered by the *furniture removal clause 105.C*. That rule says no.

Do you see their reaction to this healing? Its religion, its rules, its regulations. Instead of rejoicing that a man who hadn't walked for 38 years is now able to walk and carry his mat, they condemn him for the breaking the law. Instead of joy, there is judgement. Because they can't see past their religion. And sometimes the Church has got a bad name, because there no joy in it, only rules and regulations.

4. Repentant. So we have seen a number of responses to Jesus healing touch but the challenge at

the end of the passage is will the one who has been healed be repentant?

For what could possibly be worse than 38 years an invalid? I suppose there's an obvious answer. 39 years. But what could possibly be worse than for 39 years an invalid? Looking for the *help* that *never comes*.

Maybe you've suffered yourself. Maybe you've watched people who've suffered. And you ask yourself *what could be worse* than that? Well, there's something. And that's what Jesus is *warning about* in John chapter 5. *Not putting your faith in Jesus*. What's worse? On the last day finding yourself *condemned* because you didn't make the right response to Jesus' offer of life? What's worse? *Hearing about Jesus*. Seeing what Jesus can do & just kind of ignoring it. Letting it wash over you & not putting your trust in Jesus.

There are some things worse than physical illness, like unforgiven sin. There are some things more dangerous to our health than pain, like ignoring the God of life. There are some things that should be top of our pecking order, like knowing God's will for our life and living a life of purpose. For in the same way that if this man doesn't repent something worse could happen to him, so if we don't repent and rely on Jesus, that same worse thing will happen to us as well.

You see I started off this evening's sermon by talking about different reactions to the same joke. But you know there may be different responses to this passage of Scripture within us this evening. For some of us this passage will cause us to question Jesus. Sure it was great that Jesus healed these men, but where was he when I needed Him? When my mother was wracked in pain and lying on a bed, Jesus didn't do anything then? When I had my doubts why didn't he come with some similar sort of a miracle and blow them all away. .

Some of us will read these stories and retreat into rules. We will find safety in a code of conduct that we can follow but will help us nit pick where others fall horrible short. Some will find sanctuary in religion, by being a good Presbyterian and so hope that at the end that God will be impressed by our achievements. And some will just do nothing. Jesus will speak to you today and you will let it wash right over you.

But really what we need to do is repent from our wrong attitudes & the wrong way of life & rely upon His words. We need to look for life in the Son. We need to hear the words of Jesus & believe them. We need to find out what God wants to do with our lives & be a part of it.

Don't seek a further sign. Don't look for a spiritual touch of God. Don't always clamber after the miraculous. Don't think that faith is always about the spectacular. Instead it is about the simple things like turning from our sins and trusting in our God. So read His word. Rely on his word. Walk in his word. Trust in Jesus. And see where the life of faith will take you and me.