

John 9:1-41
March 15, 2026

Follow the Signs

In the Gospel of John, the events that would be called miracles in the other gospels, are called, “signs.” There are seven signs found in the first twelve chapters of John, sometimes called, “The Book of Signs.” They are;

The Wedding at Cana - 2:1-11
The Healing of the Official's Son - 4:46-54
The Healing of the Paralytic at Bethesda - 5:1-15
The Feeding of the 5,000 - 6:5-14
Jesus Walking on the Water - 6:16-21
The Healing of the Man Born Blind - 9:1-41
The Raising of Lazarus - 11:1-45

Things come in sevens in John's gospel, there are also seven, “I Am,” sayings. It will not hurt us to take a diversion for a moment and list them as well, they are;

I am the Bread of Life - 6:35
I am the Light of the World - 8:12
I am the Gate for the Sheep - 10:7
I am the Good Shepherd - 10:11
I am the Resurrection and the Life - 11:25
I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life - 14:6
I am the True Vine - 15:1

Signs play the role of pointing beyond themselves in the direction of a destination. “Follow the signs,” we say, to the cafeteria or the bus station or the long-term parking lot at the airport; or to the school, or even the

church. They are not meant to be the end of the line, and become problematic if they are mistaken for the destination itself.

In the case of John's Gospel, they often have at least two levels of meaning. In this case, the 1st level refers to physical blindness and sight, the 2nd to spiritual blindness and sight, meaning spiritual understanding; the ability or the failure to see and understand the things of God. This failure represents a different kindness of blindness, and in this case it was the spiritual leaders who were blind.

It is important to notice the higher level meaning, and would ordinarily be the main point. It is easy to say that what is illustrated involves insight and understanding, even knowledge, but in this case it is not just any knowledge, it is an entire piety that is being, of all things, envisioned (it is hard to speak of these things without using sight words like, “envisioning.”)

Let me, however, give attention to the sign itself. Physical blindness is nothing to be taken lightly. The reason for this metaphor is testimony enough to its importance. Along with the other senses, we depend on it, and without it often find life very difficult. So let it be the main point of this day.

(The Arvada Train)

It is always interesting to have a look at these old stories about Jesus. We sometimes cut them short

because the longer the reading, the more difficult it becomes to give our full attention. The story of the Man Born Blind along with next week's story about the Raising of Lazarus, involve a longer telling than many of the other familiar stories in the gospels. They both take up a full chapter.

It is also interesting to see the different responses to the man's healing, and not just the responses of the present day interpreters, but of the characters in the story. The religious folk, represented by the Pharisees, are concerned about the formalities. They have concluded that the making of clay from dirt and saliva comprised a violation of Sabbath laws, because it constituted work.

And since it was the Sabbath, something must be amiss. If they had been alive today they might have been taken more with the sanitary concerns involved. It is amazing how easy it is to find something wrong even with a great miracle, because it doesn't suit our notions about the religious propriety of things.

The presence of God breaks down convention. Jesus refuses to play by human rules. He does what isn't done, and isn't supposed to be done. He intervenes in life's accepted features, which is that blind people are blind and there is nothing that can be done about it.

God's grace breaks out at the wrong times and takes one's mind *off* of the formalities. Spiritual understanding is supposed to come from early morning devotions or listening to good sermons or

singing inspirational hymns, through being a good person, not on the street with broken rules and muddy saliva.

The theology of Jesus is given to us in the form of these real life stories, not some general overview. It is in a wedding at which water is turned into wine and in the healing of the blind and lame that God's kindness and love and mercy is revealed to us. It is in the Feeding of a Multitude and in the raising of a quite literally dead person.

It is the actions of Jesus in *the course* of his life that exposes our inability to understand the higher meanings of life, not in classrooms, or in formal tamed down situations where we can control the information flow. It is in real life as it is lived by ordinary people that the idea arises that there is more to hearing and seeing and walking than meets the eyes and the ears and the muscles.

It is clear that what attracted the early believers to these stories, especially the ones about sight and hearing and walking and things like that, is their concrete level meaning, and we should take that into consideration before we jump to the higher level, or the deeper meaning.

Even the man himself said at the challenge of the Pharisees, "It is a wonder!" He and his family, although they did not want to offend any sensibilities, were more focused on the fact that he could see.

In the end, our story for today clearly subordinates religious formality to the doing of good deeds; healing blindness is more important than strict Sabbath observance.

What has been revealed *lives* in these concrete stories. In this case it is the story of a man born literally blind and came also to be completely sighted, not metaphorically sighted.

“Whether he is a sinner or not, I do not know,” trying to avoid a theological conversation. “One thing I do know. I was blind and now I see,” said the man who was born blind but can now see. For the time being that is all we need to understand.

Think of the thrill of it, the surprise, the life-changing rush of adrenaline. Picture this man who had never seen anything taking in the world for the first time. The sense of amazement that the religious leaders found a reason to object, and even punish the man for getting himself healed on the Sabbath.

These kind of events do not happen every day, but they do happen enough to shake things up and make us notice.

When the disciples of John the Baptist were sent to Jesus to inquire as to whether they should accept him as, “the one who is to come, or wait for another,” to them the answer was;

“The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended because of me.”

It is the life event that starts us to seeking the deeper understandings involving the meaning of our lives, and the things of God; grace and faith, peace and hope, and love, that is willing to accept the verdict that we are sinners, because the reconciliation that follows shatters the imagination.

Rather than turning it all into a doctrine or a philosophy, or even a confessional statement, the early Christians, under that inspiration of the Holy Spirit, just told the stories, I guess they thought we could figure it out, and follow the signs.

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