



The Signs of St John

Introduction

St John's Gospel.

St John refers to himself simply as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. He is one of the twelve and one of those closest to Jesus and also to Peter. These facts - and the fact that this Gospel makes no mention of the apostle John and describes the Baptist simply as 'John', make it likely that he is himself John, son of Zebedee, brother of James, and business partner of Peter and Andrew. The early church certainly thought so - and taught that the aged apostle wrote or dictated this 'spiritual' Gospel from Ephesus in present-day Turkey. John may have been Jesus' cousin (his mother, Salome, being Mary's sister: Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25).

His Gospel is strikingly different from the other three. It was the last to be written - probably about AD 90 - and seems to assume that the readers already know the facts about Jesus' life. John supplements the other accounts, and concentrates on interpreting and bringing out the meaning of what took place. He selects from Jesus' many miracles certain 'signs' which show most clearly who he was. Everything he writes is subordinated to the main aim of bringing the reader to faith (20:30-31):

“The Purpose of This Book”

“In his disciples' presence Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life.”

In John's Gospel, he has carefully selected seven miracles as 'signs'. All have a purpose: they actively support the claims Jesus made and are intended to lead us to faith.

The scheme of the seven signs:

1st Sign: the marriage feast of Cana (Jn 2,1-12)

2nd Sign: the healing of the official's son (Jn 4,46-54)

3rd Sign: the healing of the paralytic (Jn 5,1-18)

4th Sign: the multiplication of the bread (Jn 6,1-15)

5th Sign: Jesus walks on the water (Jn 6,16-21)

6th Sign: the healing of the blind man (Jn 9,1-40)

7th Sign: the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11,1-44)

The seven signs are seven prefigurations of the glorification of Jesus, which will take place at the Hour of his passion, death and resurrection. Each *sign* symbolises one aspect of the meaning of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus for us. The great sign is the Hour of Jesus' glorification.

Adapted from: The Lion Handbook to the Bible. & <http://ocarm.org>

The Marriage Feast at Cana. (1st Sign)

John 2: 1 – 12 :

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

Meditation:

Imagine the scene – a wedding! Hurrah! A wedding and we're invited! There's singing and dancing and it's very romantic – all the oldies going misty-eyed as they remember their own weddings – and the youngsters pretending not to eye each other up and wondering and scheming – and all the while the dancing and the eating and the drinking: – All the neighbours, all the friends and all the family for nearly all the week. What fun!

In the middle of it all, the beautiful bride, dressed up and blooming and her handsome groom: Aaah! No wonder God's perfect relationship with his people is described by the prophets in terms of a wedding: "His people come to God as a bride to her groom" as they said.

And then – no wine! What a disaster! A disaster for the groom who has paid for it and for his new wife, for they will be the laugh of the area; a disaster for the caterer who will lose so much business; a disaster for the celebrations which will be ruined; a disaster for the families: what to do?

Mary and Jesus are there and Mary hears. She turns to Jesus for help. (John compares her to a new Eve, turning to a new Adam and also to God.) Jesus responds and Mary confidently tells the servants to do whatever he says. Doesn't she do that for us when we ask for help?

Maybe John, years later, uses what happened next as a metaphor for Jesus moving from the water of the old covenant to the new wine of the New Covenant; but at the time, I'm sure Jesus was thinking "Well, honestly Mother, what do you think I can do? Father, help me!" and then he sees the stone jars there, used for water. Problem solved!

"Fill the jars and take a taste to the man in charge."

The singing and the dancing can go on – the New World has begun!

A thought:

Why did John choose this story? How does it increase our faith and show Jesus as the Messiah?

Prayer:

Lord, when we read books about you, talk about you – or our faith, our church, or how we should behave – it's all very serious. Rightly so, I guess – what you came to do was very serious. It mattered and it still matters. Changing lives matters a lot! Love is important!

Someone once said "love makes the world go round" – and if it didn't go round, knowing our luck, we'd be in permanent dark: - no light, no means of seeing our way – like when we lose you, Lord. Mind you, permanent day wouldn't be funny either: hot as H.... well, you know.

We often lose sight of the fact that you like a good laugh, a good celebration, a good knees-up. You are with us in our lives, not just for the serious bits, but the fun bits as well. The story of how you helped at Cana reminds us to include you in the whole of our lives. Lord, give us a nudge when you feel left out – we don't mean to, we just get sidetracked and busy.

Lord Jesus, be with us – always. Amen

Jesus Heals an Official's Son (2nd Sign)

John 4: 46 - 54

Then Jesus went back to Cana in Galilee, where he had turned water into wine. A government official was there whose son was ill in Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judaea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to go to Capernaum and heal his son, who was about to die. Jesus said to him, "None of you will ever believe unless you see miracles and wonders."

"Sir," replied the official, "come with me before my child dies."

Jesus said to him, "Go, your son will live!"

The man believed Jesus' words and went. On his way home his servants met him with the news, "Your boy is going to live!"

He asked them what time it was when his son got better, and they answered, "It was one o'clock yesterday afternoon when the fever left him." Then the father remembered that it was at that very hour when Jesus had told him, "Your son will live." So he and all his family believed.

This was the second miracle that Jesus performed after coming from Judaea to Galilee.

Meditation:

John explains that this miracle took place in Cana and that is why the official came to Jesus asking for his help. Since the man comes from Capernaum he probably would not have been at the wedding feast so he must have been told what Jesus had previously done and that he had returned.

From the official's encounter with Jesus we cannot tell what he believed about Jesus other than the fact that he could heal his mortally ill son. There is no obvious reason for Jesus' initial response but there are two possibilities: Either he is probing the nature and depth of the official's faith or else he is creating a situation where the man can come to an understanding of the limitations of his own faith. It is possible that Jesus' first response made the official realize that there was something incomplete about his faith. He begged Jesus to heal his son then with a growing confidence he demands, "Sir, come down before my child dies." With this second request Jesus tells him to return to his home where he will find his son healed. The official did what was requested of him thus demonstrating an authentic belief that Jesus could do as he had asked without the need for another sign. He returned to his home hoping to find his son well again.

Even before the official arrives at his home he is met by his servants and he discovered that his son was healed at the precise moment that Jesus spoke. In the first sign Jesus had turned water into wine and now he had changed death to life. The result of all of this was that an official and his entire household came to a resolute faith in Jesus as the one sent by God to heal the world.

The boy was never in physical contact with Jesus but Jesus was able to heal him. His father just had to ask Jesus for help and trust him to respond.

Faith may be awakened by a sign from God but ultimately a person must say yes to the Christ whose nature and purpose is disclosed by his miraculous acts

Faith has a development. At first the official's faith is defined by his belief that Jesus can heal his son but by the end of the story he has come to a deeper knowledge of who Jesus is. He realizes that it is not only his son who is in desperate need of Jesus' healing power, but his whole family as well. We cannot tell from the story the entire content of his faith or that of his family but it must have involved a simple trust that what Jesus did for the son must be repeated in them. They came to see that they, no less than the son, needed healing.

(Adapted from: www.yorkminsterpark.com)

A thought:

Why did John include this sign?

What does it say about faith in general and my faith in particular?

Prayer:

Recently, Lord, I had to meet a councillor and his wife. He was an important man: a government official. Also, I disagreed with his politics.

I imagined this man, Lord: pompous. Yes, certainly pompous. Probably fat, too, from too many Corporation dinners. With a stuck-up wife, full of her husband's importance. They would hardly notice me: I would get a limp handshake and a nod. What I said would be disregarded if it did not fit their ideas. If they wanted something, they would not take 'no' for an answer; if I wanted something, a 'yes' would be hard to come by.

I geared myself up to meet them. To be polite while still despising them. I polished up my small talk and fixed my smile.

The two people who shook my hand were charming, Lord. Both of them. They had wonderful smiles, listened and were interested in everything – including us. Politics did not matter, just service to the community. If we wanted something, they would see what could be done. If they wanted something, it was at our convenience.

I was totally ashamed of my preconceived ideas, - and Lord, they weren't fat!

Was your official like that, Lord? He desperately wanted his son to be cured, but he listened to you, trusted you and went back home when you sent him. Would I have done that? – I really don't know.

Lord, help me to disregard my preconceived ideas and see you in all the people I meet. Help me to listen to you, to trust you and give me the grace to go without arguing when you send me. Amen

The Healing of the paralytic. (3rd Sign)

John 5:1 – 18

After this, Jesus went to Jerusalem for a religious festival. Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool with five porches ; in Hebrew it is called Bethzatha. A large crowd of sick people were lying in the porches—the blind, the lame, and the paralysed. A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. Jesus saw him lying there, and he knew that the man had been ill for such a long time; so he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

The sick man answered, “Sir, I have no one here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am trying to get in, somebody else gets there first.”

Jesus said to him, “Get up, pick up your mat, and walk.” Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking.

The day this happened was a Sabbath, so the Jewish authorities told the man who had been healed, “This is a Sabbath, and it is against our Law for you to carry your mat.”

He answered, “The man who made me well told me to pick up my mat and walk.”

They asked him, “Who is the man who told you to do this?”

But the man who had been healed did not know who Jesus was, for there was a crowd in that place, and Jesus had slipped away. Afterwards, Jesus found him in the Temple and said, “Listen, you are well now; so stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”

Then the man left and told the Jewish authorities that it was Jesus who had healed him. So they began to persecute Jesus, because he had done this healing on a Sabbath. Jesus answered them, “My Father is always working, and I too must work.”

This saying made the Jewish authorities all the more determined to kill him; not only had he broken the Sabbath law, but he had said that God was his own Father and in this way had made himself equal with God.

Meditation:

Have you ever watched people who are waiting for something – a bus, a prize, news of a child having an operation? There are two things common to all of those: hope and faith.

The man at the pond had both. He must have. Hope that one day he would make it to the water and faith that he could be cured. In thirty-eight years there must have been ups and downs – but he was still there. Although the pool was a pagan one, he was Jewish and he must have prayed to his God.

How like us he was: hedging his bets! Waiting at the pagan pool, but praying to the Jewish God. When Jesus came along, he didn't know him! Jesus worked with his faith, just as he works with ours. He cured him – and the next time they met, it was in the temple. “Stay true to God” (“don't sin any more”) said Jesus. Just like us?

A thought:

Have I ever had an experience similar to that of the paralytic: to remain for some time without any help?

What does this teach us today?

Why did John include this sign?

Does this sign say anything about our meeting with Jesus?

Prayer:

How often, Lord, do we come to do something and think – “how can I do this? Where do I start? I have nothing I can work with – I’ll just have to do the best I can.” We make a start, and we do what we can, but the job’s not good – there’s no time, the water’s not hot enough, the glue’s not strong enough – the list is endless.

It must feel like that, Lord, when you try to work with our faith:

“If you had just a little faith,” you said, “you could move mountains.”

“Just a little”! – and yet mountains are renowned for staying put. Even the mountains in my life don’t budge much!

If I really had faith – just a tiny bit – what risks I would take! Like a child, I could throw myself into the air with no support and let you catch me. I would let you turn me upside down and trust that you would hold me.

Do I do it? No! - I check my bank account to make sure I have enough for tomorrow, next week, next year, next stage in life. I trust dodgy bankers more than you, Lord. When you ask me to commit myself, I look behind me to make sure I have a way out, an escape route. Commitment to you could mean awkwardness, embarrassment, hard work, time. I might miss the News, EastEnders, a meal. I don’t trust you to see me through.

Help me, Lord, to have faith in you: to trust you with my life, my loves. Help me to throw myself into your arms and from their safe strength, move mountains!

The multiplication of the bread. (4th Sign)

John 6: 1-15

After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost." So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!"

Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Meditation:

If John were a newspaper editor, this edition would have screamed: "Jesus the New Moses!" or perhaps "Jesus for King!"

John quite blatantly compares Jesus to Moses: Moses led the people across the Red Sea - Jesus crossed the lake and the people followed; Moses went up the mountain to learn God's will - Jesus went up the 'mountain' to teach God's will; Moses asked God for food in the desert and got Manna - Jesus fed the people with bread and fish (A fish was an early Greek symbol for Christ).

John says: "he took the bread, gave thanks to God and distributed it" - obvious echoes not only of the Passover to the promised Land and the New Covenant, but also of the Last Supper, the Road to Emmaus and the Mass (breaking of bread) - feeding the people with himself.

The twelve baskets recall the twelve tribes of Israel and the people recognise that here is the one they have been waiting for: the king. Jesus flees because the king they want is not the king that he is – so he goes back up the mountain alone (Moses again!).

I often wonder what it would have been like to be in that crowd. The excitement! The bubbling enthusiasm! Listening to Jesus talking about God must have been like..- well, imagine Jamie Oliver and food, Brian Cox and the Universe and David Attenborough and Nature and then add a bit! Incredible! So incredible they forgot they needed to eat: – no food: no Morrisons, no Tesco, no Waitrose – just five little oaten loaves and two small fish for 5000 people. The people looked to Jesus and his team and the team panicked until Jesus took over. What a lesson in faith!

A thought:

The bread is multiplied because someone “very small” has the courage to renounce hanging on to his security risking failure or shamefacedness. The “young lad” of the Gospel story believes in Jesus, even though Jesus had promised nothing on this occasion.

Would I, would we, do the same?

(From <http://ocram.org>)

Prayer:

From its earliest days, the Church has celebrated the Eucharist as the supper of the Passover of the Lord where it echoes the event of the multiplication of the loaves. This prayer is similar to one inherited from the Christians of the first century:

We thank you, Father, for the life and knowledge you have revealed to us through Jesus your son.

Glory to you forever.

As Christ blessed and broke the bread and gave it out among all the people to feed and sustain them in the desert, so he continues to feed and sustain his people in the breaking of bread.

Glory be to you forever

Just as the broken bread was scattered here and there over the hills and when gathered became one, so now, may your Church be gathered into your Kingdom from the ends of the earth;

for yours is the glory and the power, through Jesus Christ forever.

*We thank you, holy Father,
for your holy name that you make present in our hearts,
and for the knowledge, faith and immortality*

that you revealed to us through Jesus, your servant.

To you Glory forever.

*You, all powerful Lord, have created all things to the glory of your name;
you have given humankind food and drink for comfort, so that humankind may give you
thanks;*

but you have given us a spiritual food and drink and eternal life through your son.

Above all, we thank you because you are powerful.

To you be glory forever.

*Remember, Lord, your Church, preserve her from every evil and make her perfect in your
love.*

*Then, made holy, gather her from the four corners of the earth into your kingdom,
prepared for her.*

For yours is the power and the glory forever.

May your grace come, and may this world pass by.

Hosanna to the Lord.

(Adapted from <http://ocram.org>)

Jesus Walks on Water (5th Sign)

Gospel Reading - John 6:16-21

When evening came, Jesus' disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat and went back across the lake towards Capernaum. Night came on and Jesus still had not come to them. By then a strong wind was blowing and stirring up the water. The disciples had rowed about five or six kilometres when they saw Jesus walking on the water, coming near the boat and they were terrified. "Don't be afraid," Jesus told them, "It is I!" Then they willingly took him into the boat and immediately the boat reached land at the point they were heading for.

Meditation:

Think what Jesus might have achieved by accepting the kingship! It's a temptation to which many a good churchman has given way and it must have been a real temptation both for Jesus and for the disciples. However, Jesus, the new Moses, goes up the mountain to pray and he sends the disciples, experienced fishermen, off across the water.

John, of course, tells his story with care. The disciples, like the small Christian communities of his time were struggling, in the dark, seeming to get nowhere – and Jesus apparently not there. Anyone who has been in a fairly small boat can easily visualise the scene: hard rowing against a headwind, increasingly choppy water slapping over the side, shockingly wet, and an anticlimactic dead tiredness that comes after excitement and with unrelenting continuous exertion.

On the one hand John recalls the Exodus: to cross the sea in the midst of difficulties. On the other, he recalls the situation of the communities in the Roman Empire.

For the People of the Bible, the sea was the symbol of the abyss, of chaos, of evil (Ap 13, 1). In Exodus the People go across toward liberty, facing and conquering the sea. God divides the sea with his breath and the crowds cross the sea which is dry land. (Ex 14, 22). In other passages the Bible shows God who conquers the sea (Gen 1, 6-10; Ps 104, 6-9; Pro 8, 27). To conquer the sea means to impose one's own limits and to prevent it swallowing all the earth with its waves.

Just as they think they will be swamped, Jesus comes to them, walking on the water. Although John says that Jesus told them not to be afraid, he does not say why: but in Matthew's account it is clear that they thought he was a phantom (Matt 14: v26.) In this passage Jesus reveals his divinity by dominating and conquering the sea, preventing the boat and his disciples being carried away by the waves. This way of evoking or recalling the Old Testament, of using the Bible, helped the communities to perceive better the presence of God in Jesus and in everyday life. *Do not be afraid!* As soon as they had recognised Jesus and taken him on board they arrived safely at the place where they were heading. Their faith in Jesus brought them through.

(Adapted from <http://ocram.org>)

A thought:

Life today can seem like trying walking on water – sometimes very rough water! How do you manage it? Who helps? Do you, like Peter, hold on to Jesus? How could you do better?

Prayer:

From this place, O God, I shall go soon into the world of many confusions. I see the daily news; I hear talk of the issues involved: - and I try to think through them as best I can.

There are the scandals which beset your church and the hostility and distain which seems to be endemic in all news reports these days.

There are the daily difficulties with which we struggle: the bills, dealing well with different people, and the difficulty of getting from place to place – either by car or public transport.

I wonder at your courage in giving to us the sacred gift of choice—we have done such desperate things with it. We have used our powers to confound you, to bring hurt and destruction on the earth.

In the midst of all the world's turmoil, and my worries, I often forget you, O God, and yet ...

I never waken to find myself forsaken—to find you are not present:

to find your power diminished;

to find your wisdom at an end;

to find your patience with me – with us - exhausted.

Again and again I fail you in behaving foolishly—forgive me, and let me try again;

refresh me, and renew my old eagerness;

strengthen me, and guide me in my choices.

I thank you with all my heart for pleasures and surprises that keep on coming; stimulating problems to solve; loyal friends and family.

We pray today for a new spirit in our hearts, and in our affairs; in our relationships in our homes and in the places where we work, and where laws are made.

We pray for the faith and the courage to go with you into the world and change it to be truly your world. Help us to walk tall and proud with your son through the choppy seas and cold drenchings that life throws at us so that, in some small way, we may do your work. Amen

(Adapted from "Prayers for the Family" by Rita Snowden. ISBN 0 00 622440 7)

The healing of the Man Born Blind (6th Sign)

John 9:1-41

As he went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should have been born blind?' 'Neither he nor his parents sinned,' Jesus answered, 'he was born blind so that the works of God might be revealed in him. 'As long as day lasts we must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world.'

Having said this, he spat on the ground, made a paste with the spittle, put this over the eyes of the blind man, and said to him, 'Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam' (the name means 'one who has been sent'). So he went off and washed and came back able to see. His neighbours and the people who used to see him before (for he was a beggar) said, 'Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'Yes, it is the same one.' Others said, 'No, but he looks just like him.' The man himself said, 'Yes, I am the one.' So they said to him, 'Then how is it that your eyes were opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made a paste, daubed my eyes with it and said to me, "Go off and wash at Siloam"; so I went, and when I washed I gained my sight.' They asked, 'Where is he?' He answered, 'I don't know.' They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. It had been a Sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened the man's eyes, so when the Pharisees asked him how he had gained his sight, he said, 'He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.' Then some of the Pharisees said, 'That man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath.' Others said, 'How can a sinner produce signs like this?' And there was division among them. So they spoke to the blind man again, 'What have you to say about him yourself, now that he has opened your eyes?' The man answered, 'He is a prophet.'

However, the Jews would not believe that the man had been blind without first sending for the parents of the man who had gained his sight and asking them, 'Is this man really the son of yours who you say was born blind? If so, how is it that he is now able to see?' His parents answered, 'We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but how he can see, we don't know, nor who opened his eyes. Ask him. He is old enough: let him speak for himself.' His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to ban from the synagogue anyone who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, 'He is old enough; ask him.'

So the Jews sent for the man again and said to him, 'Give glory to God! We are satisfied that this man is a sinner.' The man answered, 'Whether he is a sinner I don't know; all I know is that I was blind and now I can see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He replied, 'I have told you once and you wouldn't listen. Why do you want to hear it all again? Do you want to become his disciples yourselves?' At this they hurled abuse at him, 'It is you who are his disciple, we are disciples of Moses:

we know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this man, we don't know where he comes from.' The man replied, 'That is just what is so amazing! You don't know where he comes from and he has opened my eyes! We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but God does listen to people who are devout and do his will. Ever since the world began it is unheard of for anyone to open the eyes of someone born blind; if this man were not from God, he wouldn't have been able to do anything.' They retorted, 'Are you trying to teach us, and you a sinner through and through ever since you were born!' And they ejected him.

Jesus heard they had ejected him, and when he found him he said to him, 'Do you believe in the Son of man?' 'Sir,' the man replied, 'tell me who he is so that I may believe in him.' Jesus said, 'You have seen him; he is speaking to you.' The man said, 'Lord, I believe,' and worshipped him.

Jesus said: It is for judgement that I have come into this world, so that those without sight may see and those with sight may become blind. Hearing this, some Pharisees who were present said to him, 'So we are blind, are we?' Jesus replied: If you were blind, you would not be guilty, but since you say, 'We can see,' your guilt remains

Meditation:

Typically, John tells a good story, but packs it with meaning. Although he was writing for the emerging Christian communities of Asia Minor who were experiencing a traditionalist backlash, he took care to ensure that his writing had a much wider relevance and appeal. So much so that it is as true and significant today as it was when it was written.

His seven miracles or signs correspond roughly to the seven days of creation, and this is sign six – the day before the final day. In verses four and five Jesus says:

“As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Jesus is the light, so “night” is the death of Jesus. (Symbolised by the death and subsequent bringing back to life of Lazarus.)

John says that the name of the pool where the man was told to wash means “sent” and he came back seeing. Jesus told him to wash, so Jesus is the one “sent” but the people around can't quite see it. So the man who was blind comes back from the one who was “sent” being able to see, but those who could see have difficulty, and the ones who should be able to see most clearly, the religious leaders, are totally blinded by their own insistence on rules. The more the others become blind, through ignorance, fear, or their own refusal to accept the facts, the more the man born blind can see, until, in the light of Christ, he says “I believe, Lord!” and is thrown out of the synagogue.

At the beginning of the story, the disciples ask Jesus who was responsible for the man's blindness: was it his parents' sins or his own? Jesus makes it clear that sin is not involved

in the man's misfortune. Towards the end of the story, the religious leaders, who are blind to the light of Christ, say to the man: "Are you trying to teach us, and you a sinner through and through ever since you were born!" and going through the story again, there are many other examples where John is trying to demonstrate that Jesus is the true Messiah.

This story has obvious connotations for our own day and the church in our own time. All we can hope is that, by following the light of Christ, we too may be able to say with all our hearts "Lord, I believe!"

(Adapted from: <http://ocarm.org>)

A thought:

- What picture of Jesus do I carry in my mind and my heart? Where does this picture come from?
- I don't want to be like the pharisees in this reading – I want to see clearly. What do I need to do it?
- What was it about the Pharisees of Jesus' time that annoyed Jesus so much? Can we find them alive and well today?
- How can I purify my eyes to see the true Jesus of the Gospels?

Prayer:

"Unless I see the scars of the nail in his hands and put my finger on those scars and my hand in his side, I will not believe"

We laugh at Thomas, Lord. How could he not believe? He was close to the action. He knew you – he knew the others: how could he not believe?

Credo – I believe..

How often do we say that?

I believe.. Credo.. – in what? In you, Lord?

Oh yes, I know I say I do – I'm not going to make the same mistake as Thomas! – at least, I'm not going to admit it!

I want to believe, Lord, I want to feel I believe.

Like Thomas, what I really want is to feel that you're just there and I can touch you, see you, hear you clearly.

The other disciples around me tell me that you're there but..

Seeing is believing, they say.

Lord, forgive me, - sometimes I doubt, sometimes I wonder, sometimes I think.... really?

I **do** believe, Lord – sort of...

Lord Jesus, I believe, help my unbelief.

Amen

The raising of Lazarus (7th Sign)

John 11: 1-45

There was a man named Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister, Martha, and he was ill. It was the same Mary, the sister of the sick man Lazarus, who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair. The sisters sent this message to Jesus, 'Lord, the man you love is ill.' On receiving the message, Jesus said, 'This sickness will not end in death, but it is for God's glory so that through it the Son of God may be glorified.' Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, yet when he heard that he was ill he stayed where he was for two more days before saying to the disciples, 'Let us go back to Judaea.' The disciples said, 'Rabbi, it is not long since the Jews were trying to stone you; are you going back there again?' Jesus replied: Are there not twelve hours in the day? No one who walks in the daytime stumbles, having the light of this world to see by; anyone who walks around at night stumbles, having no light as a guide. He said that and then added, 'Our friend Lazarus is at rest; I am going to wake him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he is at rest he will be saved.' Jesus was speaking of the death of Lazarus, but they thought that by 'rest' he meant 'sleep'; so Jesus put it plainly, 'Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad I was not there because now you will believe. But let us go to him.' Then Thomas -- known as the Twin -- said to the other disciples, 'Let us also go to die with him.'

On arriving, Jesus found that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days already. Bethany is only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming she went to meet him. Mary remained sitting in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died, but even now I know that God will grant whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said, 'I know he will rise again at the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said: I am the resurrection. Anyone who believes in me, even though that person dies, will live, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this? 'Yes, Lord,' she said, 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world.' When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in a low voice, 'The Master is here and wants to see you.' Hearing this, Mary got up quickly and went to him. Jesus had not yet come into the village; he was still at the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were in the house comforting Mary saw her get up so quickly and go out, they followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb to weep there.

Mary went to Jesus, and as soon as she saw him she threw herself at his feet, saying, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' At the sight of her tears, and those of the Jews who had come with her, Jesus was greatly distressed, and with a profound sigh he said, 'Where have you put him?' They said, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept; and the Jews said, 'See how much he loved him!' But there were some who remarked, 'He opened the eyes of the blind man. Could he not have prevented this man's death?' Sighing again, Jesus reached the tomb: it was a cave with a stone to close the

opening. Jesus said, 'Take the stone away.' Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, 'Lord, by now he will smell; this is the fourth day since he died.' Jesus replied, 'Have I not told you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?' So they took the stone away. Then Jesus lifted up his eyes and said: Father, I thank you for hearing my prayer. I myself knew that you hear me always, but I speak for the sake of all these who are standing around me, so that they may believe it was you who sent me. When he had said this, he cried in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his feet and hands bound with strips of material, and a cloth over his face. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, let him go free.' Many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what he did, believed in him.

Meditation:

Lazarus' death is a sign for the same reason as the man's blindness (4 and 9:3). Time and again we see how Jesus' miracles back up the claims he made. No wonder he so often referred his critics to the work he was doing. He claims he can give men new, spiritual life. What clearer assurance that this is so than Lazarus' return from the dead after four days in the grave? So we too can take him at his word. Neither the disciples nor the two sisters could understand Jesus' behaviour, but the result for all of them was renewed trust in him (15, 27, 42). The event is decisive-for faith and life on the one hand and for hatred and death on the other.

(The Lion Handbook to the Bible)

They could hear the wailing a long way off and Martha came running through the olives to meet them:

“Where were you? Oh, if only you had been here, he wouldn't have died! Oh where were you? Can't you do something? God listens to you, ask Him.”

We can imagine the conversation! – but Jesus pushes back and gets from Martha a complete confession of faith:

“I believe my brother will rise again on the last day”

“I believe that you are the resurrection and the life”

“I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God who has come into the world”

John makes her belief clear and explicit, and by implication Mary's, and anyone who follows Christ.

Following this declaration, he goes to Lazarus, raising him from death to new life; making his own clear unequivocal declaration:

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die”

A thought:

Which is the central and most important point of the whole narrative? Why?

With whom can you identify yourself most: the disciples, the sisters, the Jews, or none of these?

Prayer:

What a statement, Lord!

“I do believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

Her brother newly-dead and she makes that statement: her deepest belief.

Lord, how often it is that a crisis shakes us into considering what we really believe?

Lord, we go along from day to day and half think things through. Life is busy. There are kids to feed and work to do. There are meals to get and TV to watch and when we get to bed it's late and we have to start again.

Lord, when can we think? When can we talk to you? No time!

It's only when a crisis comes – someone's ill, someone dies and we have to stop, that we really start thinking, remember you and pray.

Don't you get fed up with being the stop-gap – emergency service number four (or is it five?).

Lord, even though, like Martha, we turn to you and say “I believe” in a crisis, it's because we really do believe deep down and we know you are always there – a constant, loyal friend; - a brother, whom we call occasionally but who we know will always be ready to help or defend us.

Lord, today and always, I believe!

O Lord my God,

Teach my heart this day where and how to see you, where and how to find you.

You have made me and remade me, and you have bestowed on me all the good things I possess, and still I do not know you.

I have not yet done that for which I was made. Teach me to seek you, for I cannot seek you unless you teach me, or find you unless you show yourself to me.

Let me seek you in my desire; let me desire you in my seeking.

Let me find you by loving you; let me love you when I find you.

Saint Anselm (1033-1109)

(From: St Benedict's Prayer Book)

(A number of the 'Thoughts' come from <http://ocarm.org>)

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