

Signposts - the second and third signs in John's Gospel – Kate Day

John 4:43 – 5:9a

I wonder what you take photos of when you're on holiday? (I wonder if we can remember what it's like to be on holiday!) Views? People? Dinners, maybe?? I have to confess I'm a bit of a snapper and we have many, many photos, of all sorts of things. But there are two things I particularly "collect" when we're out. One is photos of doors in garden walls – don't ask me why, it's just a thing I do. And the other is interesting road signs.

In thinking about this reflection I've spent far too much time deciding which one to use as an example, but I've finally chosen this one. It's on the Kintyre peninsula in Scotland, and I love it because it points to a Calmac ferry in every direction. And as you know, Paul and I just cannot resist hopping on a Calmac and getting out to an island!



Last week, Paul spoke about the first of the "signs" in John's gospel. This week we are looking at the next two, both relating to healing. In one, Jesus is approached by a powerful man – a royal official – who has come to find him, seeking healing for his son. Here is a man who is used to things happening. Someone who is looking for results. He has a problem, and he wants a solution. Jesus knows this and challenges him. "Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe." It's as if Jesus were saying, "Where are you looking? What is your focus? Is it the "sign"? Do you just want an answer to what is concerning you? Or is it where – or who – the sign points to?"

In the other story, Jesus approaches a powerless man – someone who has been in the same place, waiting for a miracle, for 38 years. Here is a man who has grown used to things *not* happening. Someone who is not really expecting any results. He has a problem, but he no longer really thinks that there is any solution. Jesus knows this and challenges him too. "Do you want to be made well?" Again, it's as if Jesus were saying, "This sign you've given up waiting for – have you thought that you might be looking in the wrong place for it? That there might be an alternative sign, pointing to somewhere – or someone – else?"

In both cases, Jesus presents them with a, largely unspoken, challenge. “Do you believe that I am who you are looking for? That I have the love, the power, the authority to do this? If so, listen to me. Trust me. Do as I say...” And to the official he says, “go home”, and to the disabled man he says, “get up”.

And, of course, they do, and through Jesus, God’s love brings healing in the lives of the powerful and the powerless man alike. The official’s son recovers, the disabled man walks.

Of course, the healings are important. They are signs of God’s love and power, God’s desire and ability to make whole; to give us a sneak preview of what His kingdom is like, to show us something of the new creation which he will one day bring in.

But if we just look at the signs, we will miss something really important. The signposts which I love to photograph are just pictures, promises that down that road there is a ferry to Arran or Gigha or Islay. Unless I act on the signpost, unless I take the road, unless I follow where they point, I’ll never get to any of those wonderful islands. I’ll just be stuck at the road junction, admiring a piece of painted metal.

The signs – the “miracles” - pointed to Jesus. Pointed to Jesus being exactly who he said he was, God in human form. The God who loves the world so much that he came to live in it, among us, to show us what God is like, and to open the way to relationship with him. As John puts it at the end of his gospel “These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”

Which poses some questions about the attitudes which we, and those around us, have to signs which we encounter (or not).

Maybe we, or someone we know, approach things like the official. “Give me a sign... Answer this prayer... Do this or that...” Looking for signs, but missing who they are pointing to.

Or maybe someone we know, or we, ourselves, approach things like the disabled man. Looking in the wrong (or maybe not-quite-the-right) place for so long, that we need someone to help us to re-focus on who we should be looking to – Jesus.

And where do we find Jesus in this busy, crazy, mixed up and messed up world? It was easy for the official and the disabled man. They had him there. Right in front of them. He's back in heaven now, with the Father, isn't he?

Indeed he is. And - he has sent his Spirit to live in each one of us who believe. The Spirit who assures us that we are part of God's family. That we are part of the body of Christ. The *body* of Christ. Which we call The Church

The Church is more than the buildings. The Church is more than a gathering of kind, respectable people who care for others. The Church too is a sign – pointing away from ourselves and our activities and towards Jesus. When people look to us, they should see Jesus. When they meet with us they should encounter Jesus – his love, his power, his offer of relationship and new life.

That's quite a challenge for us ordinary human beings. But then the stories show what can happen when ordinary human beings believe in Jesus, listen to him, trust what he says, then act on it.