

Daily Office Devotional, Friday, January 8, 2021
The Week of the Epiphany
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Today we celebrate the Feast of Harriet Bedell (See below.)

Daily Office Lectionary Readings

AM Psalm 117, 118: PM Psalm 112, 113
Isa. 59:15-21; Rev. 2:8-17; John 4:46-54

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, Book of Common Prayer
Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, Book of Common Prayer
Compline (Night Prayer), Page 127, Book of Common Prayer

Daily Office Gospel Reading, John 4:46-54

4:46 Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum. 47 When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. 48 Then Jesus said to him, 'Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.' 49 The official said to him, 'Sir, come down before my little boy dies.' 50 Jesus said to him, 'Go; your son will live.' The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way. 51 As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive. 52 So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, 'Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him.' 53 The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live.' So he himself believed, along with his whole household. 54 Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

David's Reflections

John weaves the first half of his portrait of Jesus around a series of miracles that he presents as parables of Jesus' identity. He calls them "signs"; the meaning of meaning each miracle then is developed with a narrative about some aspect of Jesus' identity and mission. The first sign, the turning of water into wine, presents Jesus as the one who fulfills the hope of Judaism for cleansing and forgiveness. This second sign presents us with radical faith from someone outside the Jewish religion, almost as if John were stressing his faith as over against the unbelief of Jesus' own people. Earlier in John 4, Samaritans had come to faith in Jesus. Now, a non-Jewish nobleman believes.

The man's faith has a radical element in that he believes Jesus can heal his little boy without coming into direct physical contact. His initial request met with something of a rebuff from Jesus, an accusation that he wanted a sign in order to believe. But, the desperate father persisted. Jesus responded to that persistence by telling the man that his son would live and the man believed that word so strongly that he began the return trip. Servants met him on the way and informed him that the boy had begun to recover at the same hour that Jesus had said he would live.

The father believed again, or perhaps we are to understand that his faith grew in response to the sign. He believed without having seen, and when he did see he believed even more fully.

Although Jesus is not now physically present, he continues to do the same works of healing, salvation, and transformation that he began in Judea and Galilee. This story emboldens us to exercise radical faith in his presence and power with no visual evidence, as did this father. Such faith unleashes the powerful, saving presence of Jesus, and when we see evidence of that saving presence our faith will grow even stronger and bolder.

What persistent prayer comes from your soul today? Like this father, persist in the face of initial silence. Believe, trust, risk. That is the message in this sign. Jesus' power to act is not lessened by his physical absence. Our bold and persistent faith releases his presence and power into our lives and into the lives of those around us.

John Tietjen once wrote, "With faith we are so convinced of the reality of God's eternal world promised to us in Christ that we act on that reality in our lives and so make it real in the here and now."* This father, against all visible evidence, and desperate for his son's healing, began the return trip based on nothing but faith in Jesus' word. In spite of Jesus' physical absence, we can find the holy nerve in this story to make our own risky moves without any tangible evidence.

One afterthought. The relationship of faith to healing is not static. As John 5 demonstrates, sometimes God's response to our need comes when there is no faith. (Tomorrow's Gospel reading.)

*John H. Tietjen, "Hebrews 11:8-12," *Interpretation* 42 (Oct 88):406-407.

Collect of the Second Sunday after Christmas Day

O God, who wonderfully created, and yet more wonderfully restored, the dignity of human nature: Grant that we may share the divine life of him who humbled himself to share our humanity, your Son Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Today we celebrate the Feast of Harriet Bedell, deaconess and missionary (died 8 Jan 1969). <http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/Bedell.htm>

Collect of the Feast of Harriet Bedell

Holy God, fill us with compassion and respect for all people, and empower us for the work of ministry whether near or far away; that like thy servant Harriet Bedell, we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, and by giving up ourselves to your service. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Collect for Fridays

Lord Jesus Christ, by your death you took away the sting of death: Grant to us your servants so to follow in faith where you have led the way, that we may at length fall asleep peacefully in you and wake up in your likeness; for your tender mercies' sake. *Amen.* (BCP, 123)

In the Order of Worship for Evening

Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, creator of the changes of day and night, giving rest to the weary, renewing the strength of those who are spent, bestowing upon us occasions of song in the evening. As you have protected us in the day that is past, so be with us in the coming night; keep us from every sin, every evil, and every fear; for you are our light and salvation, and the strength of our life. To you be glory for endless ages. *Amen.* (BCP, 113)

A Collect for Mission

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 280)

