

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Personal Experience vs. Belief Fourth Week of Lent Monday, March 16, 2015
8:15 AM Is 55:17-21; **Jn 4:43-54** (See the wonders Jesus works as demonstrating the power and the meaning of his message, without demanding proof in our own personal lives.)

This gospel story is a little bit ambiguous; there seems to be a little ambivalence in Jesus toward this official. On the one hand, we see very clearly that Jesus does heal the child, the official's son; but on the other hand, he seems provoked by the request in the first place. He says, **“You people only believe if you see signs and wonders.”**

I think the evangelist tells this story in the way he does precisely to **get the believers to think about what they believe and why they believe it. The purpose of signs and wonders in the first place was to get people to see God in a new way.** This is a God who heals. This is a God who loves. This is a God who embraces. This is a God who restores—maybe not the God the people originally believed in, maybe not the way people traditionally think about God. So **signs and wonders are an important component in the preaching of Jesus himself.** It's an essential component in the very proclamation of the gospel. **It's proclaiming the gospel in action.**

But on the other hand, there is a negative side to this. Especially there's a negative side if we think only within the bounds of our own little lives and our own personal interests. **If we only can acknowledge the goodness of God, the love of God, the kindness of God, the mercy of God when we personally are experiencing it, then we really don't believe.** That's not belief. St. Paul says, **“We walk by faith, not by sight.”** **But if we actually see the goodness of God, feel the goodness of God, experience the goodness of God, the mercy of God, and so on, we are walking by sight, not by faith.**

The point being of course that we have to be able to believe in Jesus' message and **see the wonders he works as demonstrating the power and the meaning of his message without**

demanding proof in our own personal lives, because when we start demanding proof in our personal lives, now we are not believing anymore. And **the whole point of believing is to let go of that self-centeredness** that is basically natural, **and to become God-centered**. But if we are to become God-centered, we have to leave the boundaries of who we are and who we have been and who we belong to and who belongs to us, and on and on, the ordinary, worldly way of thinking about self: body, possessions, feelings, etc. So this is why this gospel is really meant to **spur us on to a deep reflection on what faith really is** and to recognize that we are all to follow the official in one way: **we are to come to believe**.