

#DONTMISSTHESIGNS | #PHJW | #ASBCSERMONSERIES



Alfred
Street
BAPTIST CHURCH

DON'T MISS the Signs

Part 1

MARCH 5/6

JOHN 2:1-11 NRSV

A SERMON SERIES BY REV. DR. HOWARD-JOHN WESLEY | @PastorHJW

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301 S. ALFRED STREET | ALEXANDRIA, VA 22314

REV. DR. HOWARD-JOHN WESLEY, SENIOR PASTOR



VILLAGE

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MOVING FROM CROWD TO COMMUNITY

Sunday, March 6, 2022 Preacher:
Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley Sermon:
Don't Miss the Signs

CURRICULUM GUIDE



INTRODUCTION TO THE 2022 LENTEN SERMON SERIES:

For our Biblical context, the Gospel of John presents Jesus' life in ways that are different from the other Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the "synoptic" gospels. The prefix "syn" means one way, while the suffix "optic" means seeing. The synoptic gospels tend to see Jesus in relatively the same manner. However, John takes a different tack. There are no parables in John and the miracles Jesus performs are called "signs". The seven signs noted in the Gospel of John, as well as all the other signs not recorded, are written so that readers may believe Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and, in believing we might have life in Jesus' name. (John 20:30-31)

During the 2022 season of Lent, Pastor Wesley will share the importance of the seven signs chronicled in the Gospel of John in a sermon series entitled, "Don't Miss the Signs."

Sermon Summary

In the Gospel of John, there are seven signs recorded. The first sign occurs in the second chapter when Jesus attends the wedding feast in Cana and turns water into wine. Pastor Wesley points out the reputational cost to the family of the wine running out. No wine is a problem for the family. But the sermon also points out the presence of Mary, the mother of Jesus. She knows her son well enough to know his power is greater than any problem. Pastor encourages us to be like Mary and to have faith that Jesus knows what to do, no matter the situation.

However, Mary is not the only one in John 2 that comes to offer us insight. In the story, the master of the feast tastes the wine that was once water, and notes that the typical manner of serving wine at a wedding calls for the best wine to be served first. However, at this moment, the master of the feast honors the family for saving the best wine until last. Pastor Wesley makes the point that when Jesus is on the scene, precedence is broken and that which is normal is overtaken by that which is divine.

Following Mary and the master of the feast, Pastor Wesley also uses the bridegroom and the servants to teach how we might receive and interpret God's signs. The host of the wedding, the bridegroom (the husband to be), is lauded for serving the best wine last. Pastor reminds us the bridegroom had nothing to do with the water being turned into wine. Still, he receives and accepts recognition for something he did not do. Pastor points out that when blessings occur, we ought to give God praise and not behave as if we are the sole source of our blessings.

Moving toward the conclusion, the sermon addresses the servants in the story of John 2. They knew for a fact that water from stone jars had now become wine. And yet, though they knew about the miracle, though they saw the good that occurred, they did not honor Jesus or praise God. Pastor Wesley reminds us there is something wrong when God blesses us and we are silent.

The final set of actors addressed in the sermon is the disciples. They see the sign, the miracle of the once water/now wine and the word of God tells us, they believed in Jesus. Don't miss the signs, Pastor tells us. See the signs, the miracles of Jesus, and believe.

Key Points

1. In the Gospel of John, Jesus' miracles are referred to as "signs", and there are seven in total.
2. There are many "signs" in our lives. There are literal signs along the roads. There are signs in the sky, portending changes in the weather. There are signs that some relationships are not healthy. Pastor urges us to see the signs.
3. The four gospels see Jesus differently. The Gospel of Mark focuses on what Jesus does. Matthew and Luke focus on what Jesus says. John focuses on who Jesus is.
4. Pastor reminds us that we should embody the spirit of Mary by bringing our concerns first to Jesus and trust Him, even if his response differs from what we desire.
5. Pastor Wesley emphasizes that we should not follow the way of contemporary culture by embarrassing and exposing people and their situations.
6. Each character in John 2 responds differently to the water being turned into wine and teaches us a lesson about responding to Jesus' signs.
7. How do we respond to the signs and miracles of Jesus in our lives? Pastor hopes we do not miss the signs that cause us to put our faith in Jesus.

Getting To Know You Questions:

1. Pastor Wesley describes the time after Jesus passes as one where stories were passed down orally from “mouth to ear.” Have you ever played a game of telephone where people whisper something into the next person’s ear, until the story has made the rounds through everyone gathered? What did you learn from this experience?
2. There are seven shapes to road signs. Each shape, by itself, conveys meaning. How many of the seven shapes can you name? What information is conveyed, uniquely, by each shape?
3. Pastor Wesley tells us to invite Jesus into our life before the problem shows up. How do you invite Jesus into your life?
4. Pastor Wesley mentions that the purpose of John’s Gospel is found in John 20:30-31. It says: “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”. What are some signs that Jesus is real in your life?

Into The Bible Questions:

1. Pastor mentioned that there were approximately forty years between the death of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. As a result, many stories about Jesus were oral recollections targeted to a specific audience with an agenda. Upon internalizing this, has this altered your perception or thoughts about the Bible and books drafted after Jesus' death?
2. Pastor Wesley says the Gospel of John is different from the other Gospels. He points out there are no parables and no miracles, as such, in the Gospel of John. Based on your knowledge of the fourth Gospel, what else distinguishes it from the synoptic Gospels?
3. Pastor states that the book of Mark focuses on Jesus' actions while Luke and Matthew focus on Jesus' words. The book of John focuses on who Jesus is. Which of those four Gospels is most influential to you and why?
4. The Disciples believe in Jesus because of the signs. Another way to say this is that the signs made Jesus' ministry "real" to them. What in your life makes Jesus real to you?





Life Application Questions:

1. Ultimately, there will be a day when the “wine runs out” for all of us. Have you already had to face a day like this? If so, how did it affect you? What maturing or growth occurred in your spiritual life after going through your situation?
2. Pastor Wesley describes Jesus’ response to Mary as, “Mary received an answer that she did not expect.” When we receive unexpected answers from the Savior, we must not lose our faith. Have you received a “no” answer to your prayers?
 - a. How did you process that experience?
 - b. In hindsight, what did you learn from that experience?
3. I Thessalonians 4:11 says, “And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands.” Pastor Wesley says, “minding our business” ought to be our spiritual discipline. How do you react to this verse?
 - a. If you were to put this verse in your own words, how would you articulate it?
 - b. If you were to live by this verse, how would your world change?



"Can I Push It?"

1. It is often reported that Mahatma Gandhi said, "I like your Christ; I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." Pastor references this quote as an indictment of the behavior of Christians. What role does the church, or religion, play in dividing the world instead of blessing the world? What role should the church, or religion, play?
2. If someone in heaven was able to roll the unedited film of the last twenty-four hours of your life, what actions might appear on screen that support Gandhi's assertion? What do Gandhi's words cause you to think about your life?
3. There are many Christians who believe drinking is a sin. If the definition of sin is "missing the mark that God sets before us", do you think drinking is a sin? Can the act of drinking ever be considered a sin?



Activity:

Before your Village, watch this six-minute video from The Bible Project. What did this teach you about reading the Gospels? <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/how-to-read-gospel/#>

Spirit Work:

Pastor Wesley notes that even though God may not do what we want God to do, God will act. God will come through. What are the practices that help you wait on the Lord when your prayers are not answered in the way or timeframe that you present to the Lord? How have these practices changed over time? What do you still need to strengthen your practices?

Additional Questions for Married Couples:

1. In every married couple, there are signs that your spouse displays. Where your spouse is concerned, what are the most important signs for you to know how to read? How might you learn to read them better? If you learned to read them better, how might your relationship shift?
2. Pastor suggested when Mary realized that there was a problem she did not “tell everybody”. She only told Jesus. When challenges arise in your marriage, who is the first person you are likely to “tell”? How does that help or hinder your movement with your spouse toward a solution?
3. The end of the text from John 2 tells us that the disciples saw and understood the sign Jesus performed and, because of that, they believed. Sometimes, seeing is believing. What have you “seen” in your marriage that now you truly believe?

Additional Questions for Young Adults:

1. Pastor Wesley mentions how important it is to invite God into your relationships. As young adults, dating tends to be a major part of our lives. Have you ever gotten into a relationship without inviting God in first?

2. The quote attributed to Gandhi regarding Christians is powerful. How have the behaviors of the church in general, and Christians in particular, made it easier or more difficult for you to consider being a Christian? If you could get a message out to the Christians in your life about the way their behavior reflects Jesus, what would you say to them?
3. Pastor reminds us that none of us arrived where we are on our own. When you look back over your life, who has assisted you in becoming who you are? How have you acknowledged their role in your life? And who are you helping to become all that God has called them to be?

Additional Questions for Parents:

1. Jesus turns to Mary with a rather snarky response to her comment about the depleted wine stock. What was Mary's response to his retort? What do you think happened in Mary's spirit when her first born child's mouth was a little "smart"?
 - a. What happens to your spirit when your children behave in similar ways?
 - b. What might we learn from Mary as we love and train our own children?
2. The text tells us that the disciples were with Jesus at this wedding. But, they play no part in the story until the very end. They, it seems, are on the sidelines watching everything unfold. At the end of the text, it says they believed because of what they had seen. Other than you, who are the people regularly before your children? What might they "see"? What might their seeing lead them to believe? As you reflect on this, what are you feeling?

Additional Questions for Women:

1. In this sermon Pastor Wesley asks, "Have you ever had a moment when God moved in such a way that you could not explain or defend it?" Have you? How did it impact you? What was your response?
2. At the end of the text, we learn that the disciples believed in Jesus because of what they had seen. What have you seen that made you believe something in a new way? What happened to you because of that new belief?
3. Pastor Wesley highlights the role of reading the 'signs' that we are in relationships with good people. What are the 'signs' that we are in a relationship with a good God? How do we know that God sees, hears, values, and loves us as God's beloved creation?
4. God loves each human being for being made in the image and likeness of God, full stop. However, the church has often considered single women as incomplete. How do you handle the church's sense that those who are not in romantic relationships are incomplete or, in the worst case, even sinful?
5. Some single women would like to be in a romantic relationship and are not. How do you reckon with the role of singleness when you have prayed for a romantic partner?

Additional Questions for Men:

1. Pastor Wesley notes that it is important to know how to read the signs around us. When you think about your life, what are the signs that you saw and read that made your life better? Are there signs you missed? If so, what lessons did you learn in hindsight?
2. There are young men looking up to you, maybe sons or nephews, grandsons or members of our communities. What would you say to them about the “signs of our times”? What do you think the “signs of our times” are telling us? What would you say to these young men about reading and responding to the “signs of our times”?
3. Some single men do not want to be in a relationship. How do you handle the pressure of society’s sense that men should be partnered in romantic relationships?
4. Some single men would like to be in a relationship and are not. How do you reckon with the role of singleness when you have prayed for a partner?

Additional Questions for Returning Citizens

1. In this sermon Pastor Wesley asks, “Have you ever had a moment when God moved in such a way that you could not explain or defend it?” Have you? How did it impact you? What was your response?
2. In hindsight, have you ever experienced or witnessed a sign from God that you ignored that led to negative consequences in your life?
 - a. if these is, and you are comfortable, please share the story and the lesson learned?
3. Pastor Wesley comments on the “bridegrooms in the church”, those who accept applause for things they did not do. How important is it to honor those who have helped you make it to where you are? What happens when you honor those who have helped you? What happens when you do not?
 - a. Is there a story about others who have assisted you that you might share?
 - b. Is there a story about how God has assisted you that you might share?

Additional Resources

1. Road Sign Shapes:

There are seven distinct shapes to road signs. To learn more about road signs click on, <https://driversprep.com/road-signs-know-the-basic-shapes>.

2. Gospel Parallels.

There are among us, Bible Geeks. Many of us on the Curriculum Committee qualify. If you are interested in seeing how the Gospels line up and differ, the following link will guide you through the Gospel Parallels. <http://www.bible-researcher.com/parallels.html>.

3. The Bible Project.

The Bible Project, noted above, is a video-based resource, for adults and children that has proven to have solid scholarship behind it and explores many topics in an easily digestible manner. For more on The Bible Project please enter the following link. <https://bibleproject.com>

4. The Seven Signs in the Gospel of John.

- a. Changing water into wine at Cana in John 2:1-11
- b. Healing the royal official's son in Capernaum in John 4:46-54
- c. Healing the paralytic at Bethesda in John 5:1-15
- d. Feeding the 5000 in John 6:5-14
- e. Jesus walking on water in John 6:16-24
- f. Healing the man blind from birth in John 9:1-7
- g. The raising of Lazarus in John 11:1-45