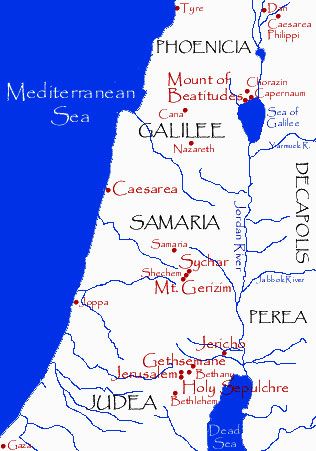
**Preface**

C.S. Lewis said that if we allow ourselves to wholeheartedly enter the story with our imaginations, then “we shall be deliciously surprised by the satisfaction of wants we were not aware of till they were satisfied.”

Considering the immersive-reading possibilities for the portion of John we have covered so far, what figurative language, passages, characters, or any other literary devices have engaged you, given a sense of wonder or newness, revived something lost, wrought discovery, invoked curiosity, left resonance long after the time you read them, offered an aesthetic or poignant experience, shifted perspective, helped you walk imaginatively through of a window into a character’s life or historical situation, created mysteries to explore…?

More simply put…*How have you imaginatively engaged with the book of John through chapter 4?*

**John 4:43-54**

**\*Why might this passage follow the Samaritan scene, other than Galilee’s geographical proximity?**

Dr. Craig Keener states, “At the heart of the story is the assertion that even a royal official in Galilee could respond to Jesus, though in this case only with signs-faith; such a moral naturally connects it with the account of the Samaritan woman’s faith” (633).

**\*What is the significance of the Cana reference? How is the word “sign” used in these two stories, and is it used differently than in the Synoptic Gospels?**

Notes: In Jewish culture, signs authenticated the “miracle worker, his teaching, or the one who authorized him” (Keener 272). In ancient storytelling (even in non-Jewish stories), miracles affirmed the authority of a deity or a powerful person.

Keener observes that miracles attributed to Asclepius, who was a Greek demi-god (son of Apollo with a mortal mother) and known for owning the secrets of healing and medicine by using plants and herbs, made him more popular than other traditionally more powerful deities (273). Miracles were associated with deities who had special powers that benefited the people, and the people, in turn, devoted themselves to the god.

**\*What do the signs in John help people like the official believe?**

Keener says, “The first, foundational period of signs in the Hebrew Bible occurred in Israel’s redemption in Exodus. Repeatedly God announced that the purpose of these signs was so that those who saw them might ‘know’ that he was Lord. Thus the signs functioned as divine self-revelation” (278-279).

* Water transformation
* Christ as true manna (He feeds people in the wilderness and names himself as the bread of life.)
* Son of Man lifted up like the serpent in the desert to save life

*Greater Than Moses*

In each of these situations, Jesus is affirmed as greater than Moses:

* Instead of water turned to blood (like a plague), water is turned to wine, associated with a celebration
* Instead of only literal food, Christ offers spiritual nourishment: “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (6:35).
* Instead of the serpent on the pole signifying healing, Christ is the figure on the cross reversing the curse of the serpent’s deception.

**According to Keener, “Extant messianic traditions do not provide clear support for the thesis that Jesus’ signs would publicly identify him as Messiah; but the briefest acquaintance with the biblical tradition could lead observers to suspect him as a sort of new Moses, which sometimes included messianic implications” (278). The signs in John “suggest that Jesus is one greater than Moses, and Jesus, God’s agent, joins God the Father as the supreme object of salvific, revelatory vision and knowledge” (279).**

Jesus also did miracles beyond those Moses experienced, and the healing in Ch. 4 is one of them.

**\*Thoughts on journey’s length, Christ’s distance from the person healed, the entire household believing**

**Consider connections to other death/life passages that allude to eternal life in John. These prepare the reader for Christ’s death and resurrection.**

Official’s son restored to life Lazarus raised from the dead Christ’s resurrection

Sources:

Brant, Jo-Ann A. *John*: *Commentaries on the New Testament*. Baker Academic, 2011.

Keener, Craig S. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Vol. 1. Baker Academic, 2003.

The Official, fictional account based on John 4:

Since that day, my servants have wondered at me. I see their eyes shift, sense their unvoiced murmurs when I am in the room. Let them be.

I used to toe their fingers along, a silent command to hurry my feetwashing, disregarding the care they would take not to run a nail along my oiled skin. Now, I rest my foot above the water, pausing their hands in the towel just as they finish. My foot bathed, under the water and now risen, cleansed, over the pool and in it. A living thing in a different space than its reflection. The foot and the image moving in the same time, although they do not touch. I marvel at the sign, while the servant bends, waiting for the end of my new ritual.

In the softening heat of the day, they find me outside under the shade of an olive tree, watching nothing but leaf shadows. The shadows are not on the tree but come from it. They are there in the dust but move in the same time as the late afternoon air through the leaves. Lately, I have begun to believe that presence is more than physically being.

I am used to giving commands that are carried out in my absence. My bending shoulders are not required for a deed to be done. But my commands are this or that. I had never thought that a word spoken might resurrect one I love…when the healer was hours away.

I look my servants in the eyes now because I have known what it is to be lowly. I have been pressed to the end of myself, with no authority for anything that mattered. So I came to a man who had no wealth, no real title, yet once, I heard, with only words, he wrought transformation no man had ever done. Water, in jars for Jewish purification rites, became wine. I heard it spirited even the servants, who marveled at the man and his strange biddings. They thought it was a sign, and I mused at their words. Now, when I pick up my goblet, I pause. There is my face in its scarlet essence. Water…wine. Clean face, now my beard trickling savory wine like blood. In shifting time, I wonder how one thing can become another, or how what one has always longed for can be so painfully sweet.

You see why the servants watch me.

I keep time by olive leaves now. My son rises just as the light touches the tip of the outermost leaf. He was sleeping, and he rises. There he lay in the wake of death, now the sunrise wakens in his soft wine-red skin. I touch that warmth in his cheek.

“Go, your son will live,” the healer said, at the seventh hour.

I went.

The servants met me on the way, eyes like newly shined coins.

The burning had subsided to gentle sleep…at what hour?

“The seventh,” they said, and the space closed between us because we looked level into souls. They knew I had become nothing but human when I left to find the man. We rested in the knowing. They were with the boy. I was with the healer. A word moved like a beam through distance, shifting the dimensions of life so that all things became new to us.

Now when I place my hands on my son’s upright shoulders, I linger in his eyes. He’s curious, but he doesn’t shift. I think he knows I am seeking something. I see into the well of his being, and I see my eyes in the soft water of his, but there is something else. We have found something, and we cannot name it. It is life, and it is death. That is what we know. We have not been the same since Jesus descended into Galilee…changed water into wine, changed fever into health. It is as though my son, my wife, my other children, my servants, myself woke up when we did not know we had been sleeping.

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