

Rector's Bible Study (RBS)  
Guest Teacher: The Rev. Kenneth H. Brannon, Vice Rector  
Saint Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church, Dallas, Texas  
Wednesday, November 8, 2023  
"John 6:1-21"

*O Blessed Lord, who caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.*

- I. Introduction
  - a. Focus of John: God
  - b. Jesus, God's beloved Son, is sent to bring light and life to the world.
  - c. Will we receive or reject the Chosen One of God?
  - d. Today: Feeding the 5,000 (6: 1-15) and Jesus walking on the water (6: 16-21)
  - e. We are using N. T. Wright's book and translation, "John for Everyone: Part One."
- II. What comes immediately before this pericope (passage)? Accusation and response.
  - a. 5:1-18 – Jesus heals the disabled man at the Sheep Gate and is eventually accused of violating the sabbath.
  - b. 5:19-29 – God has appointed Jesus to judge the world. In the fullness of time, some will be raised to new life, and some will be raised to judgment.
  - c. 5:30-38 – God (and John the Baptist) give evidence of who Jesus is
  - d. 5:39-47 – Jesus is the fulfillment of what Moses did and what Moses wrote, but the religious authorities can't see the connection.
  - e. *Question: What are the religious authorities afraid of? What part of ourselves do we see in them?*
- III. Feeding of the 5,000
  - a. This miracle occurs once in John and Luke, but twice in Mark and Matthew
    - i. All seem to draw from a primitive preaching tradition
    - ii. There are similarities and differences in the accounts
  - b. John's account
    - i. Place: beside the sea in Galilee and up the "mountain" (6:3)
    - ii. Who: Jesus, Philip, Andrew, the other disciples, and the crowd – they were drawn to him because of his "signs," a questionable motivation (6:2)
    - iii. When: almost Passover (6:4). This is the second of three mentions of Passover. Jesus is the new Moses, providing for the people with the abundance of God, leading them across the sea to freedom. "Bread of heaven."
    - iv. Jesus initiates the question to Philip: "Where are we going to buy bread, so that they can all have something to eat? (6:5)" In other accounts, the disciples ask Jesus this question. John makes it clear that Jesus is testing his disciples (6:6). Why do Philip and Andrew get speaking roles?
    - v. "Even with six months' pay," said Philip, "you wouldn't be able to buy enough bread for each of them to have just a little (6:7)!"
    - vi. Andrew: "There's a lad here, who's got five barley loaves and two fish. But what use is that with this many people? (6:8-9)"

- vii. "Make the men sit down," says Jesus (6:10). John tells us that there are about 5,000 men present. One can assume that there are women and children in addition to this number.
  - viii. "He took the loaves, gave thanks, and gave them to the people sitting down, and then did the same with the fish, as much as they wanted (6:11)."
    - 1. This action is thoroughly Eucharistic, even matching the exact words of the earliest Eucharistic forms in the *Didache*, an ancient, second century liturgical manual.
  - ix. "Collect up the bits and pieces left over, so that we don't lose anything (6:12)." Early Church was very careful about the treatment of the Eucharistic host. Also suggests the eschaton – Jesus will not lose anything (anyone) that has been given to him.
  - x. "So they collected it up, and filled twelve baskets with broken pieces of the five barley loaves left behind by the people who had eaten (6:13)." Image of abundance, like the amount of wine made from water early in the gospel. Barley loaves were used in the earliest Eucharists.
  - xi. "When the people saw the sign that Jesus had done, they said, 'This really is the prophet, the one who is to come into the world.' So when Jesus realized that they were intending to come and seize him to make him king, he withdrew again, by himself, up the mountain (6:14-15)." John presents this as a truly dangerous situation. His actual word is "fled," not "withdrew." John shows that Jesus' kingship is eternal, not temporal.
  - xii. *Question: Do we trust God's abundance? Do we live as though it is true?*
- IV. Jesus walking on the water (6:16-25)
- a. In the evening, the disciples go down the mountain to the seashore, get in the boat, and row toward Capernaum (6:16-17). In John, they do this of their own volition. In the synoptics, Jesus tells them to row across the sea.
  - b. Strong wind blows and the sea becomes rough (6:18). John is short and precise; synoptics give more detail about the storm and the disciples' fear.
  - c. "They had been rowing for about three or four miles when they saw Jesus walking on the sea, coming towards the boat. They were terrified (6:19)."
    - i. Divine epiphany; another sign
    - ii. Raymond Brown points out that the multiplication of loaves and walking on the water echo Ps. 77:11-20, Ps. 78:1-29, and Isaiah 51:6-16.
  - d. "But he spoke to them. 'It's me!' he said. 'Don't be afraid (John 6:20).'" Literally, "I AM," the name of God, used frequently throughout John.
  - e. "Then they were eager to take him into the boat; and at once the boat arrived at the land that they had been making for (6:21)." Once Jesus comes near, they reach their destination immediately. Church = boat. Imagery evokes the Exodus.
    - i. N. T. Wright: "[These events] are there, rather, as moments in the text when the strange glory of the Word-made-flesh shines through, not so much because Jesus can do whatever he wants but because this particular thing is so closely associated with what Israel's God does at a key moment in Israel's history (Wright, 76)."
  - f. *Question: What shore could we reach if we strained less and trusted more?*