

John 6.16-40 - The Power and Provision of God

John narrates the *sign* of walking on water as well as the *symbol* of true bread from heaven in the beginning of the bread of life discourse to reveal Jesus' power and authority over nature as well as his provision and abundant supply for our deepest hunger.

Jesus is able and willing to satisfy our deepest need

Introduction:

I want to let you all in on a little secret of mine. I'm sure some of the students already know this about me but I think it's about time I told you all. I have a certain guilty pleasure. An Achilles heel, you could say. I get weak in the knees just thinking about it. McDonalds. That's right, McDonalds. I love McDonalds! All it takes is a billboard with a display of a quarter pounder with cheese and I'm off on the next exit. The sign gets me drooling – the lighting and the precision they have put into building this model hamburger with an iced coke behind it. But looking at the sign pales in comparison to biting into the real thing! Marketing and advertising is a powerful strategic force in a society that is consumer driven like ours. Many successful companies thrive off of creative and clear signs that point consumers to their products. In marketing class in college, I was taught that good ads create need. But do the products they point to really satisfy? We are hungry people.

Well, you may recall how John organizes the first half of his gospel book around seven signs performed by Jesus. We've seen Jesus change water into wine. We have seen Jesus heal a boy with fever near the point of death. We've seen Jesus restore the legs of a paralyzed man. And last week, in the first part of this John 6, we saw Jesus miraculously multiply a boy's bread and fish to feed a crowd of at least 5,000 folks! And while these signs are quite spectacular, you will also recall that John reveals them as mere signs – billboards, advertisements - meaning nothing in and of themselves but which point to something beyond themselves - Something that does hold much meaning and worth and flavor and nutrition - Something that can truly satisfy our needs!

I. Sign: Walking on Water

In the text today, just following the sign of Jesus feeding the large crowd, we see yet another miraculous sign - Jesus walking on water. This isn't Chebacco Lake, peaceful and still - He isn't paddle-boarding. This isn't the branch of the Essex Bay off Conomo point – He isn't walking on a sand bank during low tide. This is the Sea of Galilee – with strong winds and rough waters – probably crashing waves. It is about 6 miles across and it says the disciples have rowed about three or four miles. They are in the middle of the lake; the middle of a storm, and Jesus is walking towards them - Jesus is walking on the water.

Not only does he walk on water, but also it says that when the fearful disciples let him on the boat, they arrived *immediately* to the shore to which they were going. Jesus comes to them in the middle of the storm and he delivers them to safety. As we read in the responsive reading, God is the one who calms the storm. Another Psalmist puts it this

way... Just like God delivered Moses and the Israelites through the Red Sea during the Exodus from Egypt, Jesus too delivers his disciples to peace and security with his presence. Jesus has authority over the winds and the waves, he has total control over the natural forces - he has the power of God!

Why does John put this story here? Actually three of the four gospel writers put this account of Jesus walking on water right after the feeding story. The feeding was a sign for the crowds; the walking on water was a sign for the disciples. Maybe Jesus wants his disciples to see something more. And notice too what Jesus says! "It is I, do not fear." Now, this phrase could very well just be translated as 'it is I' - and maybe that's all that is going on here. However, in the Greek, this is translated more literally as "I AM." Maybe Jesus says this to his disciples in anticipation of a clearer self-disclosure that he will soon give to the crowd in a symbolic fashion.

II. Symbol: The Bread of Life

So, a new day begins and the focus shifts from the disciples who have just seen the power of Jesus to the crowd who was fed the day before and who already want their next meal. And to their credit, the *crowd is indeed seeking* Jesus. So Jesus engages with them, desiring to fill their souls and not just their tummies.

"You are seeking me not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate of the loaves and got your fill." The Message puts it like this, "You have come looking for me, not because you saw God in my actions, but because I filled your stomachs for free!" They want Jesus simply and exclusively for what he can do for them. We too, without realizing it, often treat Jesus in the same manner - just wanting him for what he can do for us, not for who he is.

Sociologist Christian Smith diagnoses this problem well. In his survey of American teenagers the dominant religion today in the US isn't Christianity or Islam or Buddhism, it is what he has titled Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. He found several dominant beliefs: God exists - he wants people to be good - he wants people to be happy - and he is there if needed but otherwise leaves us alone.

We are hungry people. In our consumer driven culture, we have grown so accustomed to pursuing comfort and success and other forms of "bread," - things that will not truly satisfy us and thus we often treat our Lord as nothing more than a heavenly butler - one who is on call for our every request yet is otherwise invisible.

And we resort to moralism - we try to earn God's favor by our own righteous works. We pursue religion and righteous acts and forget the one who has God's seal of approval. We can strive to do the works of God and fail to simply believe in Jesus, the sent one from God. We go to church and we dress up yet fail to notice Jesus and what he is doing. At those times we have really missed the point.

And as if it wasn't clear enough from the massive feeding the day before, the crowd then asks him: "What sign will you give so that we may see and believe you? - What work will you do?" Prove it! They say. They refer to their ancestors - the people of Israel as they

wandered in the desert and ate the manna in the wilderness - the daily bread that God provided for Israel. They compare Jesus's feeding to the manna feeding in the wilderness.

Jesus redirects them, Moses didn't *feed* you, my Father *feeds* you with the true bread from heaven – that which has come down and gives life to the world. Jesus moves their focus from the feeding that happened centuries before to the feeding that is available right before their eyes. He shows them that this feeding is not only available for the Jewish People, but also for the entire world! We remember the famous passage from a few chapters earlier. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3.16)

And at this point they couldn't resist. Just as the woman at the well asked Jesus to give her the living water so that she may not have to come back to draw water, they too say, “Sir, give us this bread always!”

And lest they still misunderstand, Jesus paints it very clearly for them: “I AM the Bread of Life – whoever comes to me will never hunger and whoever believes in me will never thirst.” Jesus has given them a sign pointing to the provision of himself, and now he gives them a symbol. In John this is the first of seven “I AM” statements where Jesus predicates the words “I AM” with a symbol that follows. The disciples may remember Jesus' words to them on the sea and the call to not be afraid. They would remember the sign he gave them of his power. Surely the Jewish audience would hear these words and be reminded of YHWH's call to Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses sees the burning bush and hears God calling to him. “Moses, I am about to deliver my people from slavery in Egypt and you are going to lead them out!” “And I will be with you.” Moses is afraid and says, Lord, when I tell the Israelites and they ask who sent me what should I say? “Tell them I AM has sent you.” In the Hebrew the word I AM is a verb that could be translated into the past, present, and future – ‘to be’ – God was and is and is to come. He is faithful – that is his name.

Jesus has said the I AM statement and has crossed the line yet again; again he is calling God his own Father and making himself equal with God. And like he predicted, the sign and this symbol were not enough – they still did not believe.

III. Being Fed by God

And if we are honest, we too can relate to both the disciples and the crowd. We are hungry people. This notion of being fed by God is beyond our comprehension. Like the disciples, we will encounter storms in life – they are sure to come – scary experiences – are you willing to let Jesus in? He is able. He is willing. Like the crowd, we can get confused - what is truly nourishing? Especially today in our consumer driven culture where we are bombarded by signs that pull us to fill up with things that will not endure to eternal life – relationships, money, success, power, quarter pounders with cheese.

But Jesus has shown us greater signs – signs that point to himself. And as John summarizes these in the end of his gospel – These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name. So how are we

to believe in Jesus? What does that look like? John uses several analogies throughout his gospel to refer to belief. In the passage we have looked at today, Jesus invites us to come to him and to believe in him. "I AM the bread of life – whoever *comes* to me will never hunger and whoever *believes* in me will never thirst."

To come to Jesus involves certain volition on our part – we have to choose to turn to him in time of need instead of turning to other things that leave us hungry later on. We have to allow him to feed us. The beautiful thing is that when Jesus satisfies our deepest need of knowing God all our surface level felt needs seem to dissipate. Jesus promises us that when we come to him he will never lose us or cast us away – he promises that we look back and see that God all along was drawing us to himself and entrusting us to Jesus – he promises that he will raise us up on the last day when we enter his eternal kingdom with him! So we believe in Jesus – that he is sealed with God's approval, that he is the sent of from God, and that he has indeed come to give us life – eternal life here and now. So let us say along with the crowd, yet on this side of the cross, "Lord, give us this bread always!" Jesus, fill us up!

He is willing and able to satisfy your deepest need.
He wants to fill your soul and not just your tummy.
Jesus is the power and provision of God.
Amen.