

## Session Eight: Signs of Bread and Water

### Opening Prayer

Introduction to signs four and five: Multiplying the Loaves and the Walking on the Water

- Consider the two signs together because:
  - they can be seen as a unified theme in light of the Exodus story, and
  - sign number five is very short.
- This is the “3<sup>rd</sup> day” and “Pentecost event” continued: Jesus will show his identity through these signs in order to invite the response of faith.
- Multiplying the Loaves: John 6:1-15. Sign 4
- Walking on the Water: John 6:16-21. Sign 5
- There is also a long discourse that follows all the way to the end of Chapter 6, to verse 71.

### Context- before and after these stories in John’s Gospel

- This continues the book of festivals: the prior sign was sabbath cure, possibly the feast of Pentecost.
- The time of the year for this sign: It is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Passover that John notes in his Gospel.
- This puts us one year further out now from the prior sign. We have leapt one year.
- It continues the portrayal of Jesus as a fulfiller of the Moses and Exodus story
- Continues to raise the point that Jesus is doing things that only the unseen God of Israel can do.

### Context in light of the Exodus Story

- The Israelites came to know the God who controls the winds and the waves in the creation stories and especially at the crossing of the Red Sea
- After the Law is given, in their desert years, God gives them, through Moses, bread from heaven to sustain them.

### Context of Other Three Gospels as a parallel: we can KNOW these stories are real:

- All four Gospels have the story of the multiplying of the loaves
- This event must have left heavy impressions on the Christian community and was seen by them as a key to interpreting the origins and the practice of their regular Eucharistic celebrations.

### Location of this sign then and now:

- Shores of the Sea of Galilee, Tabgha, Capernaum, the Mount of the Beatitudes
- The church of the multiplication of the loaves
- Strong wind shifts are common even today on the Sea of Galilee

### The Story: Multiplying the Loaves

- Jesus returns to the Sea of Galilee, and large crowds follow him.
- They have seen his works of healing and they are captivated by him.
- But is their faith and response truly authentic? Or do they just want a wonder-worker?

Jesus goes up the mountain and looks up to see the large crowd.

- This is a Moses gesture, like Moses going up to receive the Law.
- Jesus takes the initiative to assist the people who are hungry- he sees there is want, lack, and need.
- He knows their hearts are hungry.
- He asks Philip and the others what should be done (in the other Gospels the apostles are the first to raise the issue).
- John says that Jesus knows what he is going to do which sets up the reason for the story: he does it all to show them who he is and to look for faith.

Earthly solutions, mere earthly means will fail:

- We do not have enough money to feed them all, say the apostles. They represent the worldly response to this test of their faith.

The Lord uses what is offered: five barley loaves and two fish.

- Barley is the food of the poor, and the food of Passover which is the time of the barley harvest.
- The 5000 men recline.
- To count entire households, multiply this number to get to 20 to 30 thousand people.

Jesus offers what is given to his Father in thanksgiving.

- Uses what becomes the classic Eucharistic formula: takes loaves, gives thanks, and distributes them.
- Bread and fish are given out and “they had their fill.”
- There is no lacking with God- abundant.
- The abundance of bread and fish is similar to the excessive gallons of wine at Cana: abundance.

There are leftovers

- They fill 12 wicker baskets with the food that was more than they could eat
- Jesus wants nothing lost or wasted- gather up all the fragments.
- Recalls gathering up the mana in the desert, especially on the day before the sabbath to have enough for the next day as well.
- But mana could not be stored for long or it would perish.
- These fragments may be maintained. They are the graces, the morsels of the Word of Jesus which the Apostles as leaders are responsible for collecting, storing, preserving, and handing on.

The crowds go wild:

- He is proclaimed as a prophet
- They attempt to make him king
- This is no merely ordinary prodding to make everyone share what they brought in their lunch pails. This was a legitimate work of wonder- a miracle.
- This appears to be faith, but the response is not accurate.
- The dialogue that follows will show the inadequacy of their response.
- They, like Samaritan woman before, have a faith that is based only on signs. They want a wonder worker.

**End of Session Eight**