

John 6:16-29 - Jesus Walks on Water- 5th Sign¹

Before the lesson – Prepare the handout, “Comparing the Gospels.” Prepare AV equipment to view the 3-minute YouTube video of the hymn, “Trust and Obey”:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KB4KcleYiWM>.

Fellowship Question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, begin some discussion, and lead into the study):

The last time I played in a lake was...

The last time I rode in a boat on a body of water was...

Information

- Have a class member read John 6:16-21.

“Whereas Moses led his people through the Red Sea on dry land, Jesus brings his disciples to the land toward which they were going by walking on water, something that the Scriptures reserve for God alone.”²

- Have a class member read Job 9:8.

Jesus tells his disciples not to fear. In the other gospel narratives, the disciples were afraid because of the fierce winds and waves - they feared for their lives. This element of fear versus God’s imminent salvation reminds us of a text in Isaiah.

- Have a class member read Isaiah 51:7, 10-15.

It is odd that John includes this story in his Gospel. It is a very brief story compared to the others, so different that some ancient and contemporary scholars wonder if there were two separate events.

Let’s have an open-book quiz! From what you remember or by looking at the story in Matthew 14:22-32 and Mark 6:47-53, what are the differences and similarities of these stories?

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² David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 148.

“In Matthew and Mark (but inexplicably, not in Luke), the multiplication of the loaves for the five thousand is followed by the walking on the sea...In John, verses 14-15 constitute the conclusion of the multiplication scene, and thus the walking on sea scene has more independence as a narrative...Since it would have been simpler for the fourth evangelist...to have placed the discourse on bread immediately after the multiplication, his inclusion of the walking on the sea indicates that he was controlled by an earlier tradition in which the multiplication and the walking on the sea were already joined.”³

“Jesus here is acting with the freedom of God, just as after his resurrection he appears in spite of locked doors. He is also acting with the compassion of God, bringing comfort. Yet there is, too, as with the quantity and quality of wine at Cana and the twelve baskets left over after the feeding, a sense of something more than necessary. There has been no indication of the boat being in danger of sinking - the fear is a response to seeing Jesus walking on the water. This sign is gratuitous, an intimate revelation to the disciples of who Jesus is.”⁴

Verse 21: “The verb for ‘take’ (*lambanein*) is a favorite of John for receiving and believing in Jesus, beginning in 1:12 and 1:16, and their openness to him is shown in their desire, what they ‘wanted.’ *The sign has achieved its purpose in surprising them, arousing their desire, and further opening them to who Jesus is.*”⁵

“The Passover *Haggadah*, the liturgical narrative recited at the Passover meal, as it is preserved for us from a slightly later period, closely associates the crossing of the sea and the gift of manna.”⁶

“The Haggadah (Hebrew: הַגְּדָה, "telling"; plural: Haggadot) is a Jewish text that sets forth the order of the Passover Seder. According to Jewish practice, reading the Haggadah at the Seder table is a fulfillment of the mitzvah to each Jew to tell their children the story from the Book of Exodus about God bringing the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.”⁷

The exact origin of the Haggadah is uncertain. It evolved over time. In some Jewish communities, it is still evolving. It could be that it was being formulated in the time of Jesus’ ministry and years later in the writing of John’s Gospel.

“The exact date [of first compilation] is unknown. It could not have been written earlier than the time of Judah bar Ilai (circa 170 CE), who is the latest tanna to be quoted therein. Abba Arika

³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel of John*. The Anchor Bible, Volume 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 252.

⁴ Ford, 148.

⁵ Ford, 149. (author’s italics)

⁶ Brown, 255.

⁷ Haggadah. (2023, August 23). In *Wikipedia*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haggadah>

and Samuel of Nehardea (circa 230 CE) argued on the compilation of the Haggadah, and hence it had not been completed as of then.”⁸

“During the era of the Enlightenment the European Jewish community developed into groups that reacted in different ways to modifications of the Haggadah.

Orthodox Judaism accepted certain fixed texts as authoritative and normative, and prohibited any changes to the text.

Modern Orthodox Judaism and Conservative Judaism allowed for minor additions and deletions to the text, in accord with the same historical-legal parameters as occurred in previous generations. Conservative Jews take pride in their community's resumption of the tradition of liturgical creativity within a halakhic framework.

Reform Judaism holds that there are no normative texts, and allows individuals to create their own Haggadot. Reform Jews take pride in their community's resumption of liturgical creativity outside a halakhic framework; although the significant differences they introduced make their texts incompatible with Jews who wish to follow a seder according to Jewish tradition.”⁹

We can possibly “connect the *ego eimi* formula with the divine action in delivering Israel from Egypt: the formula ‘I am the Lord’ of Exodus 12:12 is dwelt upon in the Passover *Haggadah*.”¹⁰

- Have a class member read Exodus 12:12.

“Thus, there are OT passages, particularly among those dealing with the Exodus, that help us explain why the episode of Jesus’ walking on the sea may have fitted in with the general Passover of chapter 6 of John and thus may have stayed in close association with the multiplication.”¹¹

- Have a class member read Psalm 77:16-20.
- Have a class member read Psalm 107:4-6, 25-31.

“Of course, it is difficult to prove that the evangelist had any one of these passages in mind, but they are numerous enough to make it plausible that he meant the miracle [of walking on the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Brown, 255.

¹¹ Brown, 255f.

water] to reflect the general symbolism of the crossing of the sea at the time of the Exodus and the prerogative of Yahweh to make a path on or in the waters.”¹²

Although this is not one of the traditional “I am” statements of Jesus (such as “I am the bread of life” in 6:35), John’s emphasis on identifying Jesus with the Creator and Redeemer God named Yahweh is sprinkled throughout the gospel. Here, “John treats the scene as a divine epiphany centered on the expression *ego eimi* [translated, “I am”] in verse 20....To a certain extent the evangelist uses it [this story] as a corrective of the inadequate reaction of the crowd to the multiplication. Impressed by the marvelous character of that sign, they were willing to acclaim him as a political messiah. But he is much more than can be captured by the traditional title of ‘the Prophet’ and king; the walking on the water is a sign that he interprets himself, a sign that what he is can be fully expressed only by the divine name, ‘I am.’”¹³

- Have a class member read John 6:22-29.

“No longer in verse 25 is Jesus thought of as ‘the Prophet’ and king (14-15); he is addressed with the more modest title of ‘Rabbi.’”¹⁴

What do you think happened between the time the crowd was ready to crown Jesus as King and the time they demoted him to Teacher?

“The crowd... is looking for Jesus, but he sees them as fixated on their desire for food that perishes. Jesus’ concern for the education of desire began with his opening words to the first disciples, ‘What are you looking for?’ (1:38). This chapter continues that education and also pursues two other related seminal questions that John 1 places at the heart of the learning community around Jesus: ‘Who are you?’ and ‘Where are you staying/abiding?’ The ‘courses’ of teaching that follow in verses 25-58 advance in stages and are best understood as a dialogue sermon, as suggested by verse 59: ‘He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum.’”¹⁵

V 27: food that *lasts*: “This is the favorite Johannine verb *menein* [to remain, to abide]. The idea is not that the food lasts forever, but that the food is imperishable because it gives eternal life. Compare 4:14: ‘The water I shall give him will become within him a fountain springing up unto eternal life.’”¹⁶

¹² Brown, 256.

¹³ Brown, 254, 255.

¹⁴ Brown, 263.

¹⁵ Ford, 149.

¹⁶ Brown, 261.

“Jesus answers *his own* core question, ‘What are you looking for?’ (1:38), *not their question*. [Verse 27] is a minisummary of John’s Gospel through the imagery of food...A seal was a mark of authority, validating something or someone as trustworthy, authentic, and to be believed.”¹⁷

One of the paradoxes of the Christian religion is the role of faith versus works. Which is essential? Which should be more emphasized? What happens when one is ignored?

“Paul found it necessary to fight on two fronts, against the legalism of the Judaizers and against the libertinism of some of his own followers. The legalists stressed circumcision, food laws, and the observance of special days, weeks, and seasons (Gal4:8-11; 6:12). The libertines argued that since salvation is the gift of God’s grace, we are free. Their cry was ‘All things are lawful,’ but they failed to see that such ‘freedom’ could be a new form of bondage (1 Cor 6:12)...Some preachers to this day can be heard decrying social reform and all good works as ‘deceptions of the devil.’ In their perverted doctrine, all one’s goodness is really evil. Like the Corinthian Gnostics, they would have us continue in sin (social injustice) that grace may abound.”¹⁸

Verse 29: “Jesus refuses any simple distinction, let alone competition, between faith and works.”¹⁹

“Paul and James are NT names we associate with the problem of faith and works, but here we have the Johannine solution. Obtaining eternal life is not a question of works, as if faith did not matter; nor is it a question of faith without works...[T]his believing is not so much a work done by man as it is a submission to God’s work in Jesus.”²⁰

Transformational Exercise

The hymn, “Trust and Obey,” finds a balance for this paradox.

“Daniel B. Towner, the composer of the tune, writes about the origins of this well-known gospel hymn:

Mr. Moody [Dwight L.] was conducting a series of meetings in Brockton, Massachusetts [presumably in 1886] and I had the pleasure of singing for him there. One night a young man rose in a testimony meeting and said, ‘I am not quite sure - but I am going to trust, and I am going to obey.’ I just jotted that sentence down, and sent it with the little story to the Rev. John H. Sammis, a Presbyterian minister. He

¹⁷ Ford, 150. (my italic emphasis)

¹⁸ Frank Stagg, *Polarities of Human Existence in Biblical Perspective* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1994), 150-151.

¹⁹ Ford, 151.

²⁰ Brown, 265.

wrote the hymn, and the tune was born.”

-Ira D. Sankey, *The Story of the Gospel Hymns*, 1906²¹

- Show the video:  Trust and Obey (Hymns with Lyrics)

Close in a prayer something like this: *As we abide in you, Lord Jesus, help us to find joy in trusting your word and living as you would have us live. Help us to trust and to obey. Amen.*

²¹ https://hymnary.org/text/when_we_walk_with_the_lord

Comparing the Gospels

John 6:16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, **17** got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. **18** The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. **19** When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. **20** But he said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.” **21** Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land toward which they were going.

Mark 6:45 Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. **46** After saying farewell to them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

47 When evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. **48** When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came toward them early in the morning, walking on the sea. He intended to pass them by. **49** But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, **50** for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.” **51** Then he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, **52** for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Matthew 14:22 Immediately he made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. **23** And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, **24** but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. **25** And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. **26** But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. **27** But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

28 Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” **29** He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. **30** But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and, beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” **31** Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” **32** When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. **33** And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

- *All verses are from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition.*