

John 6: The wilderness and the sea

In this story, Jesus' miracles echo the ancient story of the exodus where God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt by leading them through the Red Sea and miraculously providing for them in the wilderness.

Have you had a time when you experienced inadequacy? What did you learn and conclude?

(1) After this, Jesus went across Lake Galilee (or, Lake Tiberias, as it is also called). (2) A large crowd followed him, because they had seen his miracles of healing the sick. (3) Jesus went up a hill and sat down with his disciples. (4) The time for the Passover^a Festival was near.

(5) Jesus looked around and saw that a large crowd was coming to him, so he asked Philip, "Where can we buy enough food to feed all these people?" (6) (He said this to test Philip; actually he already knew what he would do.)

(7) Philip answered, "For everyone to have even a little, it would take more than two hundred silver coins to buy enough bread." (8) Another one of his disciples, Andrew, who was Simon Peter's brother, said, (9) "There is a boy here who has five loaves of barley bread and two fish. But they will certainly not be enough for all these people."

(10) "Make the people sit down," Jesus told them. (There was a lot of grass there.) So all the people sat down; there were about five thousand men. (11) Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to God, and distributed it to the people who were sitting there. He did the same with the fish, and they all had as much as they wanted. (12) When they were all full, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces left over; let us not waste a bit." (13) So they gathered them all and filled twelve baskets with the pieces left over from the five barley loaves which the people had eaten.

(14) Seeing this miracle that Jesus had performed, the people there said, "Surely this is the Prophet who was to come into the world!"^b (15) Jesus knew that they were about to come and seize him in order to make him king^c by force; so he went off again to the hills by himself.

^a The Passover festival celebrated God rescuing his people from slavery. The writer sees this as an illustration of what Jesus would do.

Why were the crowds so interested in Jesus?

What do you think they were hoping for?

What would Philip have been thinking as Jesus asked him the question?

Why do you think Jesus tested Philip like this?

How do you think the disciples were feeling?

Why is their perspective so different from Jesus' perspective?

What steps does Jesus go through in order to perform the miracle (11)? What do you think is the significance of each one?

What do we learn about Jesus?

What do you think Jesus would want the crowds to conclude from this miracle?

^b The Hebrew scriptures (Old Testament) contain a prophecy from Moses that God would send another prophet like him.

^c The Messiah was the king God had promised who would represent God's people and rescue them.

Why didn't Jesus allow the people to make him king?

We can show the symmetrical structure of the story like this:

Seeing the miracles (1-4)
How will we meet the need? (5-6)
Not enough (7)
What we have (8-9a)
Not enough (9b)
Jesus meets the need (10-13)
Misunderstanding the miracles (14-15)

What does this tell us about what the author is drawing our attention to within the story?

(16) When evening came, Jesus' disciples went down to the lake^a, (17) got into a boat, and went back across the lake toward Capernaum. Night came on, and Jesus still had not come to them. (18) By then a strong wind was blowing and stirring up the water. (19) The disciples had rowed about three or four miles when they saw Jesus walking on the water, coming near the boat, and they were terrified. (20) "Don't be afraid," Jesus told them, "it is I!"^b (21) Then they willingly took him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached land at the place they were heading for.

^a In Jewish thought the sea represented chaos and the reservoir of evil.

^b In the ancient story of the Exodus, God had disclosed his name to the Israelites as "I Am".

What was the disciples experience in (16) – (18)?

What do we learn about Jesus?

How does the arrival of Jesus transform the disciple's experience?

We can show the symmetrical structure of the story like this:

Setting out (16-17a)
Apart from Jesus (17b)
The surprise encounter (18-20)
With Jesus (21a)
Arriving (21b)

What does this tell us about what the author is drawing our attention to within the story?

Why do you think the author draws attention to the parallels with the ancient story of the Jews being rescued from Egypt through the Red Sea and God providing for them in the wilderness?

What might we conclude about Jesus from these stories?