



John 6:16-24
So That You May Believe: John
“When Jesus Is on Board”

Rev. Brian North
June 12th, 2022

This morning we continue in our journey through the Gospel of John. Last week we read about Jesus feeding a huge crowd with a few rolls of bread and a couple of fish, from the lunch of a little boy. All three of the other biographies of Jesus record that event as well. And then comes another event that is probably actually more famous. Luke is the only gospel writer who doesn't include this, but Matthew, Mark and John all do, and all three have it follow immediately after the miracle feeding.

There is a story about a girl who was told all her life that all the women in her family could walk on water on their 21st birthday. She never totally believed her mom, but when it came time for her 21st birthday, she was excited to give it a shot. With great anticipation and boldness she stepped out onto a lake off of a dock....and promptly fell in.

When she came back home, she confronted her mom and asked her why she couldn't walk on water. Her mother said, “All the women in the family were born in late December. You were born in July.” I've walked and even skated on frozen lakes, but that's not quite what is meant when the Bible tells us that Jesus walked on water. So, let's turn to **John 6:16-24** as we dive into ☺ God's Word to you and me today.

Ok, so last week I mentioned to you that John includes seven signs in his gospel. I could have stated that a little more clearly, and I want to do that this morning. Signs, as we talked about last week, point to, or tell us about, a thing. A street sign tells you the name of a street; a directional sign tells you where something is or how far it is to it, and so forth. These signs tell us something about who Jesus is. They're not just for show, they're not just to help people, they're not a metaphor for something else, though we certainly can learn from them. Primarily, they are signs pointing to, and telling us about, Jesus.

There are 6 undisputed “signs” in the gospel of John:

(1) The turning of water into wine at the wedding in Cana (2:1–11)

- (2) **The healing of the official's son (4:46–54)**
- (3) **The healing of the lame man (5:1–15)**
- (4) **The feeding of the multitude (6:1–15)**
- (5) **The healing of the man born blind (chap. 9)**
- (6) **The raising of Lazarus (chap. 11)**

Students of Scripture, going back centuries, have sought to identify 7 signs in John. This is due to the Biblical use of the number 7 as a number of completion or perfection, such as the 7 days of creation including the day of rest for God. Also, John gives us 7 “I am” statements of Jesus’ and so the pattern of 7 is already established in his gospel. When asked how many times someone should forgive another person, Jesus answers with a multiple of seven. So the number has prominence. But John does not actually ever record a seventh sign that he (or Jesus) identifies as a sign.

Today’s passage is one that some scholars would count as the 7th sign. It has similar characteristics to the other 6 (scholars have looked at the six to determine what they all have in common), but it also has some differences. The other event in Jesus’ life that gets significant consideration to be the 7th sign is the clearing out of the Temple back in John 2 – but also does not have all the characteristics. Other people have proposed other events from his life, as well, but these two are the ones that most people latch onto.

Personally, I’m content with 6 signs that point to Jesus. There don’t have to be 7. There’s nothing in Scripture that says, “Thou shalt have 7 signs in the gospel according to John.” In fact, the 7 days of creation are a great model for leaving it as the 6 signs that John identifies, because the 7th day of creation was not actually a day of *creation*, but a day of *rest*. It was different than the other 6 days. Similarly, the 6 signs point to Jesus, and tell us something about him, and the 7th would simply be Him. So, not a sign, but finally getting to the one who the signs point to. And: **Like the 7th day in Creation: in Jesus, we find our rest, or our peace.**

And that is what today’s passage is really about. It’s about the peace and the rest that we experience when Jesus is on board in our lives. So, after the feeding of the multitude of people from the little boy’s lunch, Jesus goes and

finds a quiet place to rest. Apparently, he was finally able to actually get some solitude with the night approaching. The disciples head out, likely having coordinated with Jesus on where he would catch up with them on the other side of the lake.

But, Jesus catches up with them in the least likely of places: out in the middle of Lake Galilee. At night. In the middle of a storm. Now, Lake Galilee, as I've shared before, can get stormy in a hurry. Because of the geography there, it is common for storms to kick up somewhat unexpectedly, as cool air comes down the mountainsides that rise over 2,000 feet above Lake Galilee. (Side note: Lake Galilee has the second lowest surface elevation of any lake on earth at about 700 feet below sea level.) Anyway, this storm kicks up, and this is not just a gentle breeze. The Greek word to describe the wind is "megas," from which get our word, often used more as a prefix, "mega".

I still remember being in late elementary school or maybe middle school and the word "mega" was "mega popular." We even used it on its own, as in "Last night's Mariners' game game was mega." Anyone else go through that phase in the mid-1980's or so? Anyway, a mega-wind kicks up and the lake gets rough (mega-waves?). In Matthew's account of this, he says that the disciples' efforts to make progress on the lake was "buffeted" by the wind. They just weren't making much progress.

And they're a little way out into the lake – 3-4 miles at this point, from what John says. The lake is about 8 miles wide, and 13 miles long. So, they're essentially in the middle of the lake. And low and behold, in the darkness of night, perhaps with rain coming down, Jesus walks out to them and meets them in the middle of the lake. At first, they're frightened. Quite frankly, who wouldn't be? But Jesus speaks to them, "Don't be afraid, it is I" and then John tells us they "were willing" to let him into the boat. When I read this, it sounds like even though they did recognize eventually that it was Jesus, that they kind of had to be convinced to let him into the boat – "they were willing." The word "thelo," which gets translated as "were willing" here, means "to will, intend, to be resolved, determined, to wish, or desire." So: **It's not a reluctant willing; they wanted him in the boat with them, once**

they realized who it was. And then John tells us that “immediately” they got to shore.

We’ve already noted that they’re pretty much in the middle of the lake. So, this “immediately” is not to say that they suddenly became a speed boat, as if Jesus is pushing them along like **Dash** pushes his mom and sister in the movie the Incredibles:



Now, Matthew and Mark say that after Jesus got in the boat, the waters then calmed down, and of course that would allow them to finish the last half of their journey much more expediently. But I think there’s something else going on here as well. **Have you ever been in a really intense, maybe even scary situation?** Perhaps a storm like we see here where trees are blowing around and maybe it feels a little unsafe; or you think you hear an intruder in your house; or even just being in a game – like a soccer game – where you’re up by one goal and the opposing team keeps pressing hard to score a tying goal: the sound of the final whistle from the referee cannot come fast enough.

Perhaps you’ve been in a situation like that where time just seemed to stand still. **Contrast that with the sense of time when everything is going well, you have peace, and you’re enjoying yourself and you want it to last forever: Time absolutely flies.** I think that’s part of what John is communicating here. Yes, the waters smoothed out. But they didn’t suddenly go 20 miles an hour or go through a portal that landed them on the beach “immediately.” Instead: Once Jesus was in the boat with them, everything was ok. They had peace. They could rest.

So what John is telling us here is that: **When Jesus is on board, when Jesus is in your life, when we willingly and desiringly** (which isn’t even a word, but it is now) **want Jesus in our lives and make space for him to get on board, it completely transforms us and gives us peace and rest.** With Jesus, the storms of life are suddenly not so threatening, and can even fade away. Terrifying problems that defy any human solution, such as the breakdown of relationships; violence and disorder becoming more common;

hopelessness and despair that seem to take hold and paralyze us...these things feel dark, stormy, and often it seems as if no one can save us or get us out of this situation. But Jesus meets us in those times, is with us, and we have peace and can find our rest with Jesus. In fact, Jesus is our peace. Scripture says so¹. He's the one that gives us peace with God and the hope for eternal life with our holy and heavenly creator because of Jesus' death on the cross as the once-for-all sacrifice for our sin and brokenness...and because of his empty tomb. When we have that eternal perspective, and we face the storms of life, and we have that relationship with God the Father, Son, and Spirit, and God is with us, we find peace and rest.

We see this (God being with us in the storms of life) throughout Scripture, from cover to cover. In Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve eat the fruit of the tree and they realized they've messed up...and do you think time seemed to stand still for them in that moment? I mean, things probably couldn't move fast enough. And yet God is there with them, and takes care of them; When the Israelites are wandering around in the desert after their lack of faith in God, God is still with them in a variety of ways, including by a pillar of fire at night and a pillar of cloud by day. Repeatedly in Scripture we see the phrase, or other very similar phrases, "I am with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you" or "As I was with your ancestors so I will be with you." **Psalm 23 makes the promise that God is with us, like a shepherd is with a sheep – leading us to green pastures and still waters, he's with us even in the valley of the shadow of death and when we are in the presence of our enemies.**

The story is told of a preacher who had a lady in his church who was not quite mentally normal. She kept coming to him and saying, "Pastor, two men are following me." The pastor would assure her that no one was behind her. Again, she would say, "Pastor, two men are following me." He tried to reassure her. She kept coming again and again until finally one day the pastor said to her, "Yes, I know there are two men following you, and I know their names."

She said, "Oh, you do?"

“Yes,” he said. “Their names are Goodness and Mercy,” and he turned to Psalm 23:6 and showed her that goodness and mercy shall follow her all the days of her life and she shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. She was so pleased to know the names of the men who were following her, and she never again caused her pastor any trouble. When Jesus is with us, goodness and mercy are following us too, and they will all the days of our lives.

You see: **When Jesus is on board, we need not fear. We can find our rest in him.** That’s what John (and Jesus) wants us to believe and to do: to welcome Jesus on board in our lives, and find our rest in him. Just as Scripture tells us that God rested on the 7th day of Creation, so Jesus is the one where we find our rest. We experience it here and now, and in eternity, which is like a 7th day that has no clock. Jesus brings that to us. And John wants us to believe that. It’s why he wrote his biographical account of the life of Jesus: so that we would believe. He says so himself, near the end of his gospel account. And so, as we’ve seen each week in this series, he’s showing us here, once again, why Jesus is worthy of our belief. He comes to us in the midst of the storms of life, and brings us peace. He gives us rest.

You don’t need to be able to walk on water to experience that peace. Although, if you wanted to try walking on water, there’s a lake right down the hill and you can give it a shot. I’ll come watch. In fact, just this last Thursday you probably could’ve tried right in front of your house, because it rained so darn hard all day. You probably had enough water to try. But we know that’s futile for us. But not for Jesus. And Jesus is the one who can actually give us peace in the midst of the storms of life, and sooth the storms themselves, right on into eternity with him. So, let’s make sure he’s on board. Let’s pray...Amen.

¹ Ephesians 2:14