

# Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – July 29, 2018

## [John 6:1-21](#)

(Click on scripture above to link directly to the passage on biblegateway.com.)

### Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage in several different translations and/or paraphrases
2. Read the provided commentary below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

### Commentary on John 6:1-21

(From *Homiletics*; “Two Fish and a 3-D Printer” – July 26, 2015)

John 6:1-21 features imagery and verbal cues that link Jesus to the salvation history and prophetic tradition of biblical Israel. The location of Jesus and the disciples “up the mountain” (v. 3) suggests Moses at Sinai. The action taking place close to Passover (v. 4) corresponds to the Exodus event. The reference to barley loaves (v. 9) makes a connection to Elisha also using barley loaves to feed many from limited resources, with leftovers to spare (2 Kings 4:42-44). In addition to underscoring Passover as a festival celebrated in the spring, mention of “a great deal of grass” (v. 10) aligns with numerous prophetic claims that the redeeming work of God is accompanied by the flourishing of an abundance of verdant land. The gathering up of leftover fragments corresponds to the Israelites gathering the manna that God provides them in the wilderness (Exodus 16:4-5, 15-16). All of this reinforces the substance of the miracle of Jesus multiplying a meager supply of bread and fish to feed 5,000, a sign that prompts witnesses to declare that he is “indeed the prophet who is to come into the world” (v. 14).

Linking Jesus to salvation history and the prophetic tradition is further reiterated as he walks on the windswept sea to the disciples (vv. 16-21). His mastery over the water recalls divine intervention in the partings of both the Red Sea and the River Jordan, when the Israelites first escaped from Egypt then eventually crossed into the Promised Land. Moreover, in the process of encouraging the terrified disciples not to be afraid, Jesus says, “It is I” (v. 20), which is translated from Ἐγώ εἰμι, the phrase found often throughout John that associates Jesus with the great “I AM” revealed to Moses (Exodus 3:14).

The specifics of the feeding itself warrant close attention in several respects. Jesus must first move past the disciples’ lack of confidence that so many can be fed with so little (vv. 7-9). Thus, he has them attend to the mundane, nuts and bolts matter of getting folks to sit down on the grass (v. 10). Here, “sit down” (from ἀναπικτω) is more accurately translated, “recline,” which is language intended to evoke not an outdoor picnic, but rather the more formal and privileged setting of a banquet.

This is noteworthy because in the cultural context of Jesus’ day banquets are venues for the exchange of honor -- patrons honor clients by inviting them to banquets and clients honor patrons by showing up when invited. As host of this impromptu mountain banquet, Jesus is the patron. In the accounts of the Feeding of the Five Thousand in the other three gospels, Jesus has his disciples distribute the food. However, in John’s version, Jesus is the patron who chooses to distribute the food himself (v. 11b), with no assistance from the disciples, which extends a certain double honor to the crowd while also demonstrating the kind of generous servant leadership he expects of his followers.

Another important aspect of the feeding is that Jesus does not distribute the bread without first having “given

thanks" (ευχαριστησας from ευχαριστεω) for it (v. 11a). While John's gospel does not include the celebration of communion in his version of the Last Supper, Jesus giving thanks in verse 11a strongly echoes his words when instituting the Lord's Supper in all three synoptic versions of the Last Supper.

The feeding concludes with the gathering of the leftovers (vv. 12-13). It has already been mentioned that this brings to mind the gathering of manna in the wilderness. In the context of verses 5-14 itself, this is when the disciples take a more hands-on role in the story. Their participation has a fourfold significance that can inform the discipleship of all who would follow Jesus. First, symbolic of the dynamics of discipleship, they are following up and through on service already initiated by Jesus. Second, when Jesus tells them he wants the fragments gathered "so that nothing may be lost" (v. 12), he could just as likely be calling the disciples to gather up people whose lives are fragmented and broken so that *nobody* may be lost. Third, unlike the manna, which does not last more than a day, the leftovers by comparison have a longer shelf life, and the disciples ensure that there is no wasting of still viable provisions that can help those in need. Fourth, it is because of the disciples' mop-up work that we know for certain what the impressive volume of leftovers happens to be, which points to the overall scope of the miraculous multiplying of loaves and fish. The disciples may not perform the miracle, but their servants' task contributes to underscoring the power with which Jesus performs it.

A crucial dimension of Jesus' power is his unwillingness to exploit it for either his own gain or adulation from others. Thus his readiness to evade those wanting to make him king in verse 15. This, too, can inform the discipleship of all who would follow Jesus. After all, if he does not seek to stand on the laurels of what he accomplishes to serve the will of the Father, then neither should we. Humility becomes disciples of Jesus.

John 6:1-21 is a passage of miracles. The preacher may want to anticipate how to address this to a 21st century audience. Before explaining away the miracles, own up to how all four gospels vouch for the miraculous nature of the "Feeding of the Five Thousand" (plus Matthew and Mark's addition of the "Feeding of the Four Thousand"), and how three of the four join the "Feeding of the Five Thousand" to Jesus walking on the water. The gospel writers are pretty sure the miraculous happened.

Some scholars have suggested that the sudden abundance of food emerges as people in the crowd follow Jesus' example by sharing whatever resources they already have with those around them. Generating radical generosity and mutual hospitality among so many so spontaneously is a miracle in its own right -- especially among a population for whom food scarcity is often an everyday burden -- as is the incredible abundance of leftovers.

## Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out another commentary available for these texts (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](http://WorkingPreacher.org).

**What questions do you have?**

**What do you “wonder” about when reading this passage?**