



Sunday, February 15, 2026

John 6:16-21

If you have your Bibles with you this morning I'd like to invited you to turn with me to John 6:16-21. And if you are able to I'd also like to invite you to stand for the reading of the Word of the Lord.

John 6:16-21

'16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. Darkness had already set in, but Jesus had not yet come to them. 18 A high wind arose, and the sea began to churn. 19 After they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea. He was coming near the boat, and they were afraid. 20 But he said to them, "It is I. Don't be afraid." 21 Then they were willing to take him on board, and at once the boat was at the shore where they were heading.'

Now this is a very interesting section because if you've been following along, chapter 6 is all about Jesus, declaring himself as the bread of life and therefore the Messiah. It starts off with the feeding of the 5000 where he multiplies the loaves and fish abundantly. Thus making the clear distinction that just as bread sustains physical life, Jesus sustains eternal life. Then from verse 22 all the way to the end of the chapter, Jesus takes time - nearly fifty verses - to unpack the significance of that claim.

And yet, sandwiched right in the middle of those two sections are six short verses about Jesus walking on the water. Which for many of us, at first glance, almost feels out of place.

But this is actually what the literary world would call a 'sandwich' structure - where the outer pieces interpret the middle. The feeding of the five thousand and the Bread of Life discourse form the outer layers. Right in the center - the peanut butter and jelly - is this story of Jesus walking on the water.

In this structure, the middle is actually the point and it is surrounded by teachings that give it con-

text and clarity. Think about it this way, you can't just eat peanut butter and jelly and call it a sandwich. The bread is needed to give it structure and is a necessary part of what makes it a sandwich.

And that tells us something important. This story is not random. It is not a rabbit-trail for John and it's certainly not filler. It is essential to the teaching of Jesus as the bread of life.

And part of that reason lies in the audience now sitting in the boat. The feeding of the five thousand was a message to the multitude. But Jesus walking on the water is a message specifically to the disciples. What He is about to teach is something specific for them to understand. Because make no mistake - just like the crowds - they themselves are also on a journey of trying to figure out just exactly who Jesus is.

And the context in which this story is told is critical. Because, at the end of the feeding of the 5000, we read that the people decide they want to take Jesus by force and make Him king but He withdraws to the mountainside. And then, immediately afterwards, we read that the disciples get into the boat without Him and start sailing to the other side - which at first glance seems like they're leaving Him behind...that they're abandoning Jesus.

But this isn't so.

This story also appears in the other Gospels and according to Matthew and Mark, we read that Jesus actually instructs His disciples to get into the boat and cross the sea and heads towards Capernaum. So they're not abandoning Him at all - they're actually obeying Him.

We pick up the story on the sea of Galilee as night falls. The disciples are alone in the boat, and the weather has started to take a turn for the worse.

And all of a sudden they see someone or something walking toward them on the water.

At first glance they think it is a ghost - which can seem strange to us. But in their cultural context, this actually makes complete sense. In the ancient world, the sea represented chaos and danger. Many believed the depths were inhabited by spiritual forces or lesser gods. Storms therefore, were often attributed to humanity angering the 'gods' rather than natural weather patterns.

So when they see a figure walking toward them on the sea - in the middle of the night - their fear is layered. It is not just about the wind and waves anymore. The cultural mythology starts to play on

their minds - especially as they now see a figure out in the distance hovering over the waves coming towards them! But as that figure comes into view, they start thinking that it could be Jesus. And then in the book of Matthew we read that Peter calls out to Jesus saying that if it really is Him, that He would command Peter to walk towards Him on the water. Jesus does this, and Peter walks on the water, but then begins to doubt and starts to sink. Jesus carries him back to the boat and then we read in verse 21 that they all make it safely to the shores of Capernaum.

Now, if you are anything like me, then when you read this story, your mind automatically goes to another almost identical story in the gospels that also includes a night on the Sea of Galilee, another storm, and the same frightened group of disciples. And I don't think it's by chance that this other story exists. And if we take a look at both of these stories, we can get an even greater picture of what Jesus is trying to teach His disciples here.

You see, we've already seen in this chapter that Jesus duplicates miracles with purpose - feeding thousands of people twice to demonstrate that He is Messiah not only for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. Similar miracles. Distinct meanings.

And today I want to show you something similar with these two storm accounts.

The Gospel of Mark shares this story:

Mark 4:35-41

'On that day, when evening had come, he told them, "Let's cross over to the other side of the sea."
36 So they left the crowd and took him along since he was in the boat. And other boats were with him. 37 A great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking over the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. 38 He was in the stern, sleeping on the cushion. So they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher! Don't you care that we're going to die?"

39 He got up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Silence! Be still!" The wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 Then he said to them, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

41 And they were terrified and asked one another, "Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey him!"

Ok, so as I stated earlier, although these are very similar stories, they are not the same. And history teaches us that the story where Jesus calmed the storm happened first. This means that by the time

we reach John 6, the disciples have already seen Jesus command the wind and the waves one other time before.

So, they already know He has authority over the wind and the waves - they've seen it first hand.

And yet, in both stories, I'm sure you've noticed that the element of fear is front and center.

In the first story of the calming of the sea, the obvious fear is that they are going to die which makes sense - given the intensity of the storm. You have to keep in mind that these are seasoned fishermen and would have spent most of their life on this exact sea so it must have been one wicked storm for them to be fearing for their lives like this. But once Jesus calms the storm, notice that another kind of fear sets in. Mark tells us, '...they were terrified and said, 'Who then is this? Even the wind and the sea obey Him!'

Jesus had already calmed the storm at this point. He stopped the threat. Yet Mark tells us now they respond with terror. The Greek word here is the word Phobos which is a layered word. In this context though, terror is best described as holy and reverent awe. It's the exact same word that is used for the shepherds when the angel of the Lord appeared to them telling them that the Messiah had been born. So, it's not fear of death or physical harm. It now shifts to holy and reverent awe....as the realization of who Jesus actually is starts to set in.

Keep in mind, it's not just the wind and the waves that obey Him. It's also this ancient belief of what was underneath the wind and the waves, causing the storm in the first place. This might have been viewed as mythology for society, but for the disciples, there was a very real spiritual realization that was happening here as well as scholars suggest that this storm may in fact have been demonic. Where are Jesus and the disciples headed to? Chapter 5 tells us - the region of the Gadarenes - which is where we are introduced to the demon possessed man who has a legion or 6000 demons in him. So, some theologians suggest that these demons actually knew that Jesus was coming their way and so they were the ones that caused the ferocious storm with the full intent of stopping Jesus from healing this man and interfering with their territory.

And when Jesus stands up and calms the storm, He's not just showing His authority over nature, but now over every spiritual being by silencing the attack of the enemy. And so if you were the disciples sitting in the boat witnessing this, this is where the awe and terror really comes into play - as the realization of who is sitting in the boat with them starts to sink in - that Almighty God is among them. And in that very moment they are confronted with the fact that the Alpha and the Omega is

in their very midst.

Now, in the second story - that likely happens only a few short months later - we see a lot of the exact same elements. The disciples are again on the water at night. A storm arises. But this time Jesus is not in the boat. And instead of calming the wind and the waves, He now walks towards them on top of the waves.

And I wonder if that's part of what caused the confusion for the disciples. They had seen Him calm a storm before. They had watched Him speak and the wind obeyed. So if this really was Jesus, why wasn't He addressing the storm?

Instead, He now comes to them walking on top of the churning waves beneath His feet. And so seeing their fear and bewilderment, He speaks these words, 'It is I, do not be afraid.'

Which is a really interesting phrase for Jesus to use here.

Let's look at this phrase in two parts:

First: 'Do not be afraid.'

This is familiar language. All throughout the birth-story of Jesus, this is the exact phrase that the angel of the Lord uses when appearing to Zechariah, the shepherds, Mary and Joseph. It is the language Scripture uses when humanity stands in the presence of the divine.

But secondly, notice now that He doesn't say, 'It's me Jesus.' He simply uses the phrase, 'It is I.' In fact, if you were to look into the Greek specifically on this one, it is actually better translated as, 'I am.'

Sound familiar??

It should.

Because those are the very words spoken to Moses at the burning bush when he asked God His name.

God simply responded with, 'I AM.'

And so by using the exact same language as God, Jesus is showing the disciples, that He is the One that split the red sea in the days of Moses...that He is the One who spoke to Moses on the mountain as smoke and fire. They've already seen Him calm the stormy seas and now they are watching Him victoriously walking on top of it. Divinely declaring His authority over every physical and every spiritual authority from past to present to future.

That this is Jehovah. This is the Great I AM, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End....now in their midst - on their boat. Not just a man with a divine nature. Not an angel sent by God. But this is God.

And so what is their response? What else can it be!? Fear. Which is why Jesus now says, 'Do not be afraid.'

It's the same word - phobos - that Mark uses in chapter 4 when the disciples were filled with awe after Jesus calmed the storm. There, the fear carries the sense of holy and reverent awe - the realization of who He is.

But here in John, the context is different. They think it's a ghost - they're afraid that maybe the underworld could be raging against them and their fear is better described as panic - being seized with alarm. Which is why Jesus addresses it by saying, 'Do not be afraid.' Don't panic boys. Don't be seized with alarm.

He's not correcting their holy and reverent awe, because that response is right. It's good. It's appropriate. In fact, that is what King Solomon calls wisdom.

Proverbs 9:10 says,
'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,
and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.'

In other words, when you truly see God for who He is - when holy and reverent awe towards Him settles into the depths of your soul - that is where wisdom begins.

Proverbs also teaches us that the fear of the Lord is to hate evil. In other words, wisdom begins the moment we recognize who God is - holy, sovereign, just - and we understand who we are in light of Him.

But here's the difference.

For some, that fear produces hiding - like Adam in the garden, or Jonah running the other way.

But for those who have placed their faith, hope and trust in the salvation that Jesus Christ offered, then that fear produces reverence. Because we realize who He is...and who we would be without Him.

And that realization produces surrender and repentance.

It even produces worship.

It's why Moses took off his sandals, it's why the shepherds trembled, it's why Isaiah hid his face and why John fell as though dead.

Because when the holiness of God is revealed, holy and reverent awe is the only reasonable response.

So maybe the question for us here today is simply this:

Who do you say Jesus is?

Is He just a teacher?

A miracle worker?

A moral leader?

Or is He the Great I AM - the One who splits the seas, stands over the chaos, who commands the storm, who reveals Himself in the dark, and who calls you not to panic but to trust?

Because how you answer that question determines everything.

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