

Bible study on John 6.1-21

Begin with an opening prayer

God, our generous provider,
as the young boy offered all he had to Jesus – five loaves and two small fish –
we come today offering you everything we have:
a pocketful of faith, a bit of time, ourselves, our gifts, our talents.
And we know that, however small our gift or offering,
you will do amazing things with it,
far more than we can ever hope, believe or imagine.
Thank you, awesome God.
Amen.

Read the passage

Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.

Explore and respond to the text

Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.

Bible notes

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle shared between all four Gospels (apart from the resurrection). However, John's context is different from the Synoptics. First, he stresses that it is Passover season with all the significance that has for bread; and second, Jesus makes all the running (vv.5-7). Then, there's the lovely and unique episode with Andrew – eager to please (see John 1.41), bringing a packed lunch to Jesus. You can imagine the other 11 disciples behind him, nudging each other and muttering 'muppet'! But Jesus takes it and turns it into a banquet for five thousand with a basket left over for each disciple, Andrew included. Maybe the lesson for those who called him a muppet is that Jesus can make use of whatever paltry, inadequate offer we make. He takes it without comment – none of the 'is that it?' attitude of many in church, especially leaders!

The crowd think this proves that Jesus is 'the prophet'. This is an echo of Deuteronomy 18.15, where Moses promises to send a prophet 'like me'. Maybe this promise had been fulfilled many times – not least in Elisha – but John wants us to ask if it is

particularly fulfilled in Jesus. He gives the crowd's view without comment. But we are left to wonder whether this is one who will lead his people out of oppression as Moses did, and to ask ourselves: Is the feeding in the wilderness a sign of that? But Jesus leaves and so do the 12 – in opposite directions (v.15). Jesus goes to the hills as he realises that this crowd want to make him the king who would lead them in a rebellion (John's account has few of the rebellious echoes of the Synoptics, but they are there). The 12 head for the shore, get in the boat and leave without Jesus. Why? Did Jesus tell them to do this? Probably. After all, they are unlikely to have forgotten that he wasn't with them!

But in the night, Jesus comes on the water. This is pretty much the same story the Synoptics tell, and John has Jesus give the same answer: Ego eimi – I am. It is an echo not of Moses but of the God who called Moses from the bush. And for us reading John's account – though not the disciples because they hadn't read chapter 1! – we know who he is (see 1.1-5). And notice that Jesus doesn't seem to get into the boat; rather it seems that his presence speeds the boat to shore. There is no explicit word about calming the storm, but it is implied in the final verse. Is this the end of the story? Well, no. As we shall see, the crowd followed because they felt Jesus had left them mid-conversation.

Reflection

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

On a hill in Galilee, a boy offered his lunch. In 'lockdown', did someone offer you food? Did you deliver food? Huge numbers of ordinary people pulled together so that everyone was looked after. Many did jobs out of their normal experience. Footballers delivered food parcels. An airline pilot drove a van. Office workers helped on the shop floor. Children earned sponsorship money. What about you? What in your life can you offer to God that he can take and use? In worship, do you feel too awkward or embarrassed to offer to be involved? Spare a thought for Andrew who suggested those few morsels would feed a crowd! We don't need the answers to 'how', rather we need to have faith that what we bring, God will multiply.

Questions for reflection

You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss the theme.



- When have you shared something you felt to be small but made a big difference to someone (or not shared because you felt it too small)?
- What else do you have that God might be calling you to share?
- How best might that be done?

Prayer

A prayer of thanksgiving

Thank you, Lord, that you go ahead of us into our communities;
you are there pouring out your generosity and your hospitality in our neighbourhood.
Thank you that as you are transforming our homes, our streets,
our schools, our places of work, you are transforming us so we can play our part.
Thank you that we can come together as one,
sharing all that you have given us.
Thank you, Lord.

Amen.

A prayer to end the Bible study

Lord, help us to remain thankful for even the simple things.
Keep us focused on your loving, generous nature,
so that we can freely share what we have and who we are.
Let us be cheerful givers and humble receivers,
that all may have enough and be satisfied.

Amen.