

Feeding 5,000 in John
28th July 2024

Ephesians 3:14 - 21
John 6:1-12

John's gospel is different.

Different in tone - its not a travelogue, biography.

Different in characters - we meet people like Nicodemus, Josephus, the Bethany family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

Different in language - its easy to study in Greek - lots of repeated words -

Look, see, witness, know, believe.

It has pairs -

Light and dark

Truth and falsehood

Life and death

Above and below

Love and hate

Flesh and spirit

Its like someone has said these things over and over again in teaching or in prayer.

It has a different sense of time to the other gospels.

If you read the others you'll find it is one season of preaching and teaching and then off to 1 passover in Jerusalem.

In John its hard to tell. The text is full of 'now' or 'recently' but then there are flash forwards or flash backs. Famously Jesus clears the temple in chapter 2 in John, but its the final week in the others.

My feeling is not that we need to make all of the gospels line up in some chronological order, but we need to experience it - you remember some birthdays more than others, we remember and we get muddled, its not the when something happened that matters so much as what happened, what changed, what was said - and maybe what happened before or after. People remember where they were when Kennedy was shot - not what day of the week it was. That's not the point.

So what's happening with the feeding of the 5000 is that John says - the Passover is coming up. He's framing this story with the story of Moses leading the people to freedom and the meal eaten in a hurry.

John talks about signs rather than miracles - and he's chosen precisely 7 of of the many miracles Jesus did and said - think about these ones. These are pointing to something deeper, something greater. Don't just go - oh wow, he turned water into wine! Ask what's it pointing to? What's it saying? And there are lots of clues for us to work these things out.

And the feeding of the 5,000 is one of those 7.

Its the only miracle or story about Jesus mentioned in all 4 gospels, apart from the crucifixion

(If you think about it, Even the virgin birth in a stable is only mentioned twice.

I'm like. - where is the festival of the feeding of 5000? If we have Christmas?)

Seems pretty important - more than just a picnic.

And in John there is no last supper - bread and wine. There's several chapters of Jesus speaking, but no mention of the meal. So this is that.

So lets begin...

He goes down to Galilee and up to Jerusalem.

These are the same words for below and above.

He comes down to earth and up to heaven

He meets us where we are, down, and lifts us up

He crosses a lake

Remember the water and the spirit in his conversation with Nicodemus

Water is about life, he will say - I AM the Water of life.

Water is there in Genesis, the chaos from which life springs.

Water is a threat in the storms on the lake.

The sign of the man at the pool who is healed when the waters are stirring.

At the end of this story Jesus will not just cross the lake, but walk on it!

He has power over the waters of life and chaos.

When we studied the old testament - the ancient god Marduk is shown on a throne on water - he is a god of chaos. The Israelites were always scared of the sea - not a sea fairing nation. But the ancient Gods were seen enthroned on the chaos - see Psalm 93 -

The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, yea, than the mighty waves of the sea.

At the end of this Jesus walks on water - the very image of a god.

Jesus went up the mountain - just like Moses

Sat down - like a king, a ruler.

He tests Philip - actually a good translation is *tease* - how are we going to feed this lot?

He already knows. In John Jesus knows what's going on. He knows the thoughts of people, the hearts of people, and he knows what's going to happen - having committed himself to his father he takes a towel and washes their feet.

Jesus is not swept along by circumstances or events. He is not at the mercy or whim of others. Even when Lazarus dies, it is part of a plan. God and Jesus know.

Does Philip know where the food will come from?

The wine steward didn't know where the new wine was to come from.

The woman at the well didn't know where the living water would come from.

Philip has not learnt the lesson - 6 months wages wouldn't be enough!

No. Just like us.

We fear we are not good enough for Jesus love. There isn't enough goodness in my life to buy 6 months in the kingdom. I have to try harder, to find rules to keep, to find rules for others to keep - my lack of trust in Jesus ability to provide and give is staggering. That's why John wrote about Philip. To encourage us.

Andrew is less despairing than Philip, he says - here's something...

Andrew's from the same town as Philip, he's the one who brought Simon Peter to meet Jesus - helpful chap! He finds a small boy - John details. Barley loaf - 1/3 of the price of wheat. Dried fish - picked little sprats from the lake.

Ahh - Fish - the greek word Ichthus - that word and sign the early christians used.

This is not much to feed so many. Not a lovely English countryside picnic.

Sit down on the grass.

Not because its a lovely English picnic. If you've ever been to Israel - its not that green.

This is not grass, but grazing land. The word is fodder, that's the word Jesus uses when he says I am the bread of life. This is the place the animals get fed.

Now - to get all priestly and technical.

When I say that the feeding of the 5000 in John is the last supper of the other gospels its for very specific reasons.

The meal on the night Jesus was betrayed - the one we do week by week.

It can be called the Eucharist. Because Eucharist means - Thanksgiving in Greek.

And Jesus took the bread and gave thanks - the word eucharist.

That's the word in the other gospels when Jesus did that. And the word here.

Jesus broke them and gave them out - passed them round.

Just like he did at the last supper.

The people are reclining on the grass - play find the word - and it occurs when the 12 are reclining at the last supper.

As much as they wanted, when they were satisfied, gather up the leftovers - this is all giving Moses and the Manna in the wilderness. There's so much backward and forward here - layers on layers.

It is the disciples, the 12 tribes, who gather the fragments - in the other gospels its the people - and is this reminding them - none shall be lost..

Compare with wedding at Cana

Fill the water pots to the brim -

here's a boy with some bread and fish

Bring your humanity - your whole, true self

Then the wine is lifted out, lifted UP

Lift UP the boys offering

Expose your humanity to the UP, to the heavenly

Change our whole ego-centric world to the heavenly law of LOVE

Then take the wine to the feast

Give the bread to the people

This transformed you is for others,

You have been given love and grace in abundance so that you can share that love with others.

Moses fed his people in the wilderness and led them from slavery to freedom

Jesus feeds us and leads us to freedom.

He is never more cross than at the pharisees who want to make it about rules!

This is not about getting into heaven, but enjoying the abundance of God.

The free gift of God.

When we offer ourselves to God - bring ourselves to the Light

Then we are transformed, and sent into the world to be signs of God

To be God's ambassadors, or John's word - witnesses.