

Have you ever noticed how signs are such a significant part of our everyday lives? There are signs to help us navigate from one place to another: street signs, highway markers, transit maps. Then there are signs that exist to keep us out of harm's way: It might say "slippery when wet" or just that green exit sign in the back of the room telling us where to go in case we need to evacuate.

Then, of course, there are signs used for commercial uses: a company's brand or logo, a digital ad designed to capture our attention. Finally, there are signs that are more symbolic: a snake wrapped around a staff points to health care. A blind folded woman, holding up scales, points to justice.

One thing we know about signs is the sign itself isn't the point—signs point beyond themselves. A logo is not the company. A wedding ring is not the marriage. A road sign is not the destination.

Have you ever seen a tourist taking a picture of a road sign? I have, but if they never get to the destination it points to, what good is it? You don't want to fall in love with the sign. In fact, when you arrive at that place to which the sign points, the sign is no longer needed.

When we come to the Gospel of John, it's crucial we understand the nature and purpose of signs. John constructs his gospel around seven signs. We just listened to the account of two of them here in John 6. But it's not until the end of his gospel that John tells us what these signs point to.

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:30-31

These signs are meant to bring us to faith in Jesus, and through faith have life in his name. Not just a physical life, but a spiritual, eternal life. Life in the now and not yet kingdom of God. The signs are great, but don't fall in love with the signs. Fall in love with the One the signs point to!

Two Stories as Signs

When Kevin assigned me this passage, I was a bit perplexed. On the one hand, I felt like he threw me a softball. I mean these two miracle stories are all-time favorites. If you grew up in church, you were taught to share your lunch like this little boy did! So, I can preach on that! But, on the other hand, I've never heard a sermon on both of these stories combined. You do one or the other, not both. It's like two really big scoops of ice cream! Both are really good, but a bit much at one time.

The truth is there's some significant differences in the two stories. The first sign takes place in broad daylight; the second sign takes place in the dark of night. And while the miracle of the loaves and fish is public amidst a great crowd of people, the second is only seen by the 12 disciples. In the first sign, Jesus multiplies what they already have—five loaves and two fish, but he pulls off the second with no preexisting material at all.

So there are differences that set these stories apart. But the more I studied, the more I came to see the benefit of putting them together. Think of the similarities. They're both signs pointing to Jesus as the Son of God. Both are miracle stories pointing to him. Both are reminiscent of a significant event in the history of Israel.

John hints of this in verse 4, "the Jewish Passover was near." This was a time when the Jews recalled how Moses led Israel out of bondage and through the Red Sea, just as Jesus here walks on water. It was also a time when they recalled God providing manna to sustain his people in the wilderness, just as Jesus provides bread for the crowd. So Jesus is being portrayed in both stories as a new Moses leading a new kind of Exodus. He walks on water; he provides bread.

Both of these stories constitute a testing of the disciples' faith. John says in verse 5 that Jesus was testing Philip when he asked how they'd feed all these people. No doubt the disciples' faith was also being tested by the storm. This also reminds us of Moses. He told the Israelites that God led you through the desert to "*humble you and test you to know what was in*

your heart" (Deut. 8:2). In both stories the disciples are being tested.

Finally, both of these stories reveal human insufficiency. Apart from Jesus stepping in as the All-Sufficient One, there would be no bread for thousands of hungry people, and there would be no safe harbor for the 12 storm tossed disciples. Think about how this played out in both stories.

Jesus Feeds the Multitudes

In the first story, Jesus is the All-Sufficient One who multiplies five loaves and two fish to feed what probably amounted to as many as 20,000 people. John sets this up telling us Jesus crossed to what would have been the east side of the Sea of Galilee; known as the Golan Heights. We know from other gospel writers that Jesus hoped to get some time alone with his disciples, but instead a "great crowd" of people followed him there because they'd seen the signs he'd already done.

So Jesus goes up on a mountain and sits down with his disciples. He looks up and he sees a sea of people approaching him and turns to Philip and asks, "*Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?*" (v. 5). How'd you like to be Philip in that situation? And why Philip? Apparently, Philip was from this area so Jesus was probably thinking, "If anyone will know where to get bread around here, he will."

John lets us in on a little secret. He says, "He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do" (v. 6). It's not like Jesus is stumped over how to solve this problem. He knows exactly what he's going to do. But he uses this as a learning opportunity for his disciples. Despite all he'd seen Jesus do, Philip was still thinking on an entirely human level. He responds, "*It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!*" (v. 7). I don't think he passed the test, do you?

Then Andrew speaks up and points to the boy with his lunch: "*Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?*" (v. 9). Notice Andrew calls them barley loaves, which was known as food for the poor because it was cheaper than wheat. It's like, "A lot of help this will be!"

I don't know if Andrew was being sarcastic or not, but Jesus has the crowd sit down. He takes the loaves and fish and gives thanks. What did he say? "We thank you for this food and for the hands that prepared it." Like, one little boy's mother Then John says they "distributed to those who were seated," and they all had

"as much as they wanted." Then they were walking around at the end of the day, picking up the leftovers—enough to fill 12 baskets.

And notice what John says, "After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.'" They're thinking back to the book of Deuteronomy where Moses said to the Israelites, "*The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you... You must listen to him...*" (v. 14). This was a messianic prophecy and they're saying, "This must be him!" Then John closes the story by reporting the people wanted to anoint Jesus as King right there and then.

Passover was like our 4th of July. The Jews were oppressed by the Romans, so there was this strong nationalist fervor, and they want Jesus to lead them in a revolution. But Jesus refused to serve anyone's purpose but those given to him by his Father. And so, he withdraws. Don't get me wrong, he was a King, but the revolution he'd bring would not be with a sword but a cross. In fact, later when Jesus teaches his disciples he tells them he doesn't just provide bread, he is bread. He's the bread that came down from heaven. He's the bread broken so that we might live. Later Jesus will tell them, "*For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world*" (v. 33). That's him—Jesus is the bread, broken for us.

So this is an important sign. In fact, it's the only miracle found in all four gospels. This sign points to the all-sufficiency of Jesus. Through the cross, he provides not just enough but more than enough "leftovers" for those who believe. Woven into this story is this truth: we ourselves are insufficient. We don't have what it takes to meet the needs around us. So often, like Philip, we fail the test: "There's no way, Lord, for us to pull this off." Yet, God always provides more than enough.

I'm still learning this. Almost five years ago, I started the Bay Area School of Ministry. With most of the seminaries and Bible schools vacating the Bay Area, we wanted to provide training for people to become equipped, both theologically and practically, for ministry. We started with very little—five barley loaves and two fish—but God provided and we are expanding. So we decided to hire a full-time person to help us expand and eventually take over when I'm too old to think straight. God provided the right person, so we hired him.

But that was a huge step of faith because we had no idea how we were going to pay the guy. We offered

up our five loaves and two fish, and God provided in a miraculous way. I could spend the rest of this sermon telling you about it, but I can't because I need to move on to the second story.

Jesus Walks on Water

This is another sign and it shows us, in a different way, the all sufficiency of Jesus amidst our own insufficiency. Unlike the first, this is a very personal sign—just for his disciples. Jesus has sent them across the Sea of Galilee without him. Other gospel accounts tell us Jesus made them get up so he could go up on a mountain to pray. So off they go. This takes place in the dark of night. John often uses darkness symbolically for fear, confusion, and spiritual uncertainty. So, the mood here is ominous.

Then John says, *"A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough"* (v. 18). The Sea of Galilee was notorious for storms like this. John reports they rowed three or four miles, which would take several hours. Now it's well past midnight. Their shoulders are burning with endless rowing. Their feet are freezing from soaking in the icy bilge. I can see Peter with his soggy beard flying in the wind, barking orders. The Jewish people were not seafaring people. In fact, the great waters were seen as places of chaos and confusion. I'm sure they felt acutely more than ever the absence of Jesus.

Then, all of a sudden, they see someone approaching their boat. "Are we seeing this right? Yes! It's Jesus! He's walking on water! Impossible!" Jesus is defying the law of buoyancy, technically called the Archimedes Principle, which says if the weight of the displaced fluid is less than the object's weight, the object sinks. But Jesus isn't sinking. He's walking.

Notice John says when they saw him, "they were frightened" (v. 9). Now it's not the storm that scares them, but Jesus. Mark's gospel tells us they thought he was a ghost. There was a popular superstition back then that if you see a spirit at night you were done for. I think they saw their whole lives pass before them.

One of the key themes in both of these sign stories is the misapprehension of the disciples. In the first story, that's seen in Philip's answer to Jesus, "It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for all these people!" We see it also in the crowd who wants to crown Jesus as King and start a revolution. Here, it's seen in them being frightened by the One who has come to rescue them.

Then we hear these words from Jesus: "It is I; don't be afraid" (v. 20). Jesus identifies himself in a very significant way. "It is I." In the Greek this reads, *ego eimi*. Literally, this translates to, "I AM." Remember, this was the name God gave to Moses when he asked, "What is your name?" God said, "Tell them I AM sent you." With that Jesus says, "Do not be afraid." Why not be afraid? Because I AM. Then maybe they remembered Psalm 77, *"Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen"* (Ps 77:19).

And then it says, *"They were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading"* (v. 21). Just as in the previous story they participated in the sign by distributing the bread, here they participate by bringing them into the boat. With that, another miracle took place—John says, "immediately the boat reached ashore."

The Signs Point to Jesus as the All-Sufficient One Amidst Our Own Insufficiency

So, once again, thru these signs we see the all-sufficiency of Jesus amidst our own insufficiency. When I say the all sufficiency of Jesus, what do I mean? He's not just a great man; not just a masterful teacher; not just a prophet—he's the Messiah, the Son of God. Later in this chapter, Jesus makes another audacious claim. He says, "I didn't just come to bring bread, I AM the bread. I am the bread of life." No one else can say that but him. And he's the only One who can walk on water, defying the laws of nature, and say, "I AM. Be not afraid."

So in these two stories we have two signs pointing to a rather audacious claim about Jesus Christ. C.S. Lewis wrote about this in his book called, *Miracles* something profound about how these two miracles are different. He called feeding the multitude "a miracle of the old creation." This kind of miracle just speeds up processes already found in nature. If Jesus is the creator, he can do that! Think about it. Every year God makes a little corn into much corn; a seed is sown and it multiplies. The same with turning water into wine; Jesus just sped up the natural process. These are miracles of the old creation. Certainly, if Jesus is the One who created these natural processes, he can do that.

But walking on water is different. Lewis called it "a miracle of the new creation." There's no natural process by which water can support a human body, so Lewis said this is a foretaste of the new creation; a momentary foretaste of the future breaking into the present. In a sense, all Jesus' miracles point to the new

creation. In the old creation there's hunger, but not in the new creation. Jesus feeds the hungry. In the old creation there's disease, but not in the new creation. Jesus heals the sick. In the old creation there's chaos, but not in the new creation. Jesus calms the storm. In the old creation there's death, but not in the new creation. Jesus raises the dead.

So these two signs point to Jesus as Creator and Lord of both the old creation and the new creation to come. So don't be enamored with these two miracles. Why? Because they're signs, and signs are meant to point to something beyond themselves. They point to Jesus who says, "I AM. Be not afraid." They point to him who says, "I AM the bread of life."

A Word to Skeptics

Now I know in a group this large there are some who aren't convinced. Maybe you're open; that's why you're here. But feeding 20,000 people with five loaves and two fish is preposterous, and walking on water defies the most fundamental laws of nature. But think about this. If you're just open to the idea of God, then you have to be at least open to the possibility of miracles we see here. If there's a God who created all of life, why couldn't he do this? In his prologue, John introduces Jesus as the creator of the universe who stepped down into our neighborhood. It'd be surprising if the creator of the universe, who established the laws of nature, couldn't interact with them and occasionally override them. Having created them, he can also do what he likes with them.

But here's the deal. Even if you might concede these are miracles that Jesus somehow pulled off, that still wouldn't be enough for you. Do you know why? Because you're looking at the signs and not the One they point to. Later in verse 30, these same people who saw him feed the multitude, who ate the bread themselves, asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?" (v. 30) Can you believe that?

You see, they were enamored by the signs and failed to realize that he is the sign. Even the disciples, who'd just passed out the bread and fish, when they saw him walking on water, they were frightened. They were frightened by the storm, but also by Him! You'd think they say, "Jesus, good to see you; we've been waiting for you"? But no!

I've heard people say, "I'd believe in God if I just had a watertight argument." Don't just look for a watertight argument, look for a watertight person. Even if you're

here, and you don't believe in God, Jesus says, "Look at me. Look at my life. Look at my claims." You see, this watertight person is himself a watertight argument.

A Word to Believers

I'm sure the majority here are believers. You're here to worship him. You've given your life to Jesus, trusted him as your Savior, you're following him as your Lord. You say you believe in the all-sufficiency of Christ. But here's what you can learn from this story: Just like the disciples in this story, he'll put you in situations where you're insufficient; where you do not have what it takes; where your very best resources are not enough.

To discover the all sufficient of Jesus you have to first hear Jesus ask, "Where will we buy bread for all these people to eat?" You have to be out there in a boat with the waves crashing upon you, gripped with fear. He will test you, again and again. Sometimes he'll ask you to offer up what little you have and it's almost laughable. But he'll use that to provide more than enough!

Sometimes all you can do is welcome him into your boat. We all have our little boat, don't we? I've got my boat. I've got my issues and challenges. They're not yours. I have to trust him for my family issues, my ministry issues, and my health issues. You've got your issues. You've got your boat. You've got your storms. You've got your fears. And he says the same thing to you as he does to me: "*It is I (ego cimi). Be not afraid.*" The question is, will you let him in your boat?

This has been a year of testing for my own family. We've walked through two very serious health crisis. We've felt weak, desperate, and without the strength to sometimes even get through the next day. But we've tried to offer up what little we have to him. In our confusion and fear we've let him into our boat, and Jesus has shown up for us, time and time again. No one gets a free pass on this. We all have to learn this, usually the hard way.

I have a pastor friend in Michigan, named Don. We did our doctorates together and became fast friends. He even taught at one of our CPC men's retreats. Don retired from a long pastorate in his church soon after I did. He and his wife were looking forward to more time together and new ministry opportunities, but I didn't hear from him for about a year. Then last week he called me. He sounded different. He said a year ago he was in a bicycle accident and broke his neck, severely injuring his spinal cord, and been in wheelchair ever since. That is Don's boat. He's learning about the

all-sufficiency of Jesus in ways he never could have before.

I have another friend I reconnected with a couple of years ago after almost 60 years. Two months earlier, he and his wife were watching their two grandchildren for their daughter and son-in-law. The two year old somehow unlatched the lock on their patio door, managed to get through the protective fence around the pool, and drowned. How do you get through that? In all their pain and grief, they offered up what little they had to him; they welcomed Jesus into their boat, and he's bringing them to shore.

We all have to learn this. It might be in our marriage, or in our career, or in our health, or in our ministry, or with our kids. Even the apostle Paul had to learn this. In 2 Corinthians he asks the question, "Who is sufficient for these things?" And then he answers his own question, *"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God"* (2 Cor 2:16; 3:5 NKJV). Paul had to learn this, just as we do.

So, look at the signs, but don't get stuck on the signs. Get stuck on what the signs point to—the all sufficient Jesus. Offer up to him what you have. Let him in your boat. Your insufficiency is no match for his all-sufficiency!