

## The Fifth Sign: Walking on Water, John 6:16-21

1. Compare John's account to Mt 14:22-33 and Mk 6:45-52. Why does John omit what he omits (and keep what he keeps)?
2. This isn't the first time the disciples were caught in a dangerous squall on the open water, but the previous time Jesus had been there to save them (Mt 8:23-27). Just in the past week, Jesus sent them out to preach the kingdom, heal and cast out demons just like their master. Following this incredible high, Jesus twice in 24 hours puts them on the spot, showing them their *inability* to do what he does. What are they to learn here?
3. "By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them" (17b). While literally true, there may be a figurative meaning here as well. We may note that In John, Nicodemus comes in the dark (3:2); Judas, intent on betrayal, steals off into the darkness (13:30); and now the disciples, not yet indwelt by the Spirit, struggle in the darkness. We may also read this as a simple description of the world the church has lived in for the past 2,000 years.

The lesson may be simply, When all is dark, look not around you, nor inside of you, but look for Jesus, and you will know peace. This is surely good advice, but how do you put it into practice?

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*Fun fact:* "The Sea of Galilee lied about 600 ft below sea level. Cool air from the south-eastern tablelands can rush in to displace the warm moist air over the lake, churning up the water in a violent squall." [Carson]

*Further fun fact:* As early as Origen (and possibly earlier), readers saw a second miracle here, in the "immediate" arrival on shore (21).

*Final fun fact:* "Bethsaida" means literally "house of fishing [or hunting]", or "fishtown".

## Extra questions and observations:

1. Were they in the storm because they'd disobeyed the Lord (like Jonah), or because they'd obeyed him (like Paul)?
2. Note that the storm at sea had threatened the disciples before (Mt 8:23-27), but that time Jesus was with them. This time he's not, and how they must have felt inadequate, like they'd failed to learn the lesson they were meant to learn.

**Leader's Intro:**

The disciples hit a high when sent out by Jesus to tell people about the kingdom and heal and cast out demons. Jesus calls them to go alone with him to sort of talk through what they'd learned and seen, and the crown descends on them. That brings "high" #2: the feeding of the 5,000, which wasn't without its tension, as Jesus doesn't just perform a miracle, he first hands them the mic in front of everyone, and puts them on the spot. But all is well and the crowd is amazed—but too amazed and try to force him to be their king, at which point Jesus disappears off up a mountain, telling them to go off into the boat across the lake.

So far so good, but a terrible storm blows up, exhausting them. Jesus by this time is walking across the lake to get back to HQ, and happens to walk by them—and they see him without recognizing him and are terrified. In that dark moment Jesus speaks to them, they recognize him, the storm is calmed, and they reach their destination.

As a sign, this passage tells us Jesus is only the human ever recorded who is able to walk on the water. Moses and Elijah and Elisha *parted* water, but only God walks on it:

"He alone stretches out the heavens  
and treads on the waves of the sea." (Job 9:8)

(see also Ps 77:20). If we leave this passage understanding that, we have done well, and understood more than the crowd. However, if we look deeper, we may be able to understand the things which only the 12 grasped from this encounter.

(Note: There is some dispute over whether Jesus "walked on" or "waked by" the water, but Carson neatly handles that.)

## Notes

### I. Background

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### II. Words and Phrases

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### III. Themes

a. ...

### IV. Observations

a. ...

### V. Questions

a. ...

### VI. To do

a. ...