

Semicontinuous

2 Sam. 11:1–15

Ps. 14

Complementary

2 Kgs. 4:42–44

Ps. 145:10–18

Eph. 3:14–21

John 6:1–21

# Signs of Jesus' Power

**Goal for the Session**      *Seeing signs of Jesus' power in John 6, adults will clarify their role as followers.*

## ■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

### Focus on John 6:1–21

#### WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," Robert A. Bryant

The people, however, do not fully understand either the significance of the moment or Jesus' identity. They see in Jesus the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:15–18, and they may connect this feeding to Elisha (2 Kgs. 4:42) and even Elijah (Mal. 4:5), but the significance of this feeding miracle runs deeper. God promised the arrival of a Messiah who would satisfy the people's needs for food and justice (see Pss. 37:19; 81:10, 16; 132:15–17; Ezek. 34:15–16), even as he inaugurated a new exodus into the freedom of God's rule (see Isa. 40:3–11; 49:8–13; etc.). So when the people move to make Jesus a king rather than worship him as Lord, he slips away.

#### WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Douglas John Hall

What is truly awe-inspiring is not that someone could walk on the surface of the water without sinking, but that his presence among ordinary, insecure, and timid persons could calm their anxieties and cause *them* to walk where they feared to walk before—in the end, all the way to their own Golgothas. What is genuinely miraculous is not that a dead body should come to life again, but that through the journey with the crucified one, the disciple community was enabled to find hope on the far side of despair, faith that could live with doubt, and the courage to live beyond the sting of death.

#### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Karen Marie Yust

Faith communities also need to balance periods of intense social ministry with times of internal reflection on God's call. Spiritual introspection in response to social approval helps congregations remain faithful to Christ when alternative interpretations of their work threaten to overwhelm their true purposes. Congregations can develop a communal process of evaluation and discernment that examines their ministries for congruence with the church's created end as a reverent and exuberant servant of God.

#### NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Cheryl Bridges Johns

Our congregations are filled with people who have grown accustomed to facing overwhelming need: Katrina, tsunamis, and on and on. It is easy to look at the sheer magnitude of need and in light of small resources ask, "What are they among so many?" It is easy to come to the end of knowledge and in that place to despair. In the "prayers of the people," we place before the Lord the great needs of humanity. We may find echoing back the words, "What do you have?" Whatever we have is not enough. Yet, as this text points out, the "not enough" is not the final answer. When placed in the hands of Jesus, human weakness and finitude become more than enough.

**FOCUS SCRIPTURE**

*John 6:1–21*

## Focus on Your Teaching

To have power in today's world, one must have money, or be able to curry favor from those who do. The lure of power is seductive, even for those who call themselves Christians. Some are drawn to the messages of televangelists, who promise to harness the power of the living God to gain health, wealth, or happiness—in exchange for a small donation. Others struggle to live out their faith in a culture where the powers and principalities run counter to what truly matters. Adults may welcome the opportunity to encounter signs of authentic power and to further discern their calling as disciples.

*Holy God, help me prepare so that I may lead others to hear your Word.  
Amen.*

**YOU WILL NEED**

- newsprint or board
- markers
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 1 for August 2, 2015

For Responding

- option 1: Resource Sheet 1, paper, pens
- option 2: Resource Sheet 2
- option 3: hymnals with the hymn “Will You Come and Follow Me (The Summons),” accompaniment, paper, pens

## LEADING THE SESSION

### GATHERING

*Before the session*, print the following on a board or newsprint: *In today's world, I define power as . . .* For option 3 in Responding, make arrangements for a musician to accompany the hymn, or find an Internet source for the music, such as [www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHEjyGfRO7s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHEjyGfRO7s)

As participants arrive, welcome them. Point out the open-ended prompt and invite them to jot down a phrase on the board or newsprint in response. When most have arrived, ask one or two volunteers to read their responses. Ask:

- Who has power in our world?
- Where do you see power being used to benefit others?
- Where is power being used in detrimental ways?

Tell the group that in this session they will explore another kind of power—a power revealed in Jesus that points to his character and purpose.

Pray the following:

*O God, guide us as we explore your Word, that together we may encounter your surprising grace. Amen.*

### EXPLORING

Explain that today's focus scripture encompasses two stories of extraordinary actions of Jesus. Ask a volunteer to read aloud John 6:1–15. Tell the group that this miracle story is the only miracle story that is included in all four Gospel accounts, testifying to its significance. Form three smaller groups or pairs and assign one of the following to each to read: Matthew 14: 13–21; Mark 6:30–44; and Luke 9:10–17. After they read, ask each pair or group

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are called the synoptic Gospels (from the Greek *synoptikos*, "seeing together"). These three accounts agree extensively in language, in the material they include, and in the order in which events and sayings of Jesus are recorded.

Encourage participants to resist getting bogged down in a debate about the rationality or veracity of miracles. The "how" question is less important than the "why" question: the underlying reality of what Jesus reveals about God and God's power.

**EASY  
PREP**

to summarize the story. Give the group the information from the sidebar about the synoptic Gospels. Then ask:

- ✧ How does the account from John's Gospel differ from the other three accounts?
- ✧ In what ways are all four accounts essentially the same?

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the rest of the focus scripture, John 6:16–21. Explain that, as in John, this story is included in both Matthew and Mark (though not in Luke) immediately after the account of feeding the five thousand.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Focus on John 6:1–21). Ask the group to read the "What?" excerpt in silence. Invite volunteers to read aloud some of the passages cited in the excerpt (Deuteronomy 18:15–18; 2 Kings 4:42; Psalms 37:19; 81:10,16; 132:15–17; Ezekiel 34:15–16; Isaiah 40:3–11; 49:8–13). Discuss:

- ✧ What kind of leader is revealed in these passages?
- ✧ What sort of power might the people have been expecting Jesus to reveal?

Ask the group to read silently the "Where?" excerpt. Then ask them to consider each of the two miracle stories and discuss the following:

- ✧ In each story, what does Jesus *do*? What does he *say*?
- ✧ What do Jesus' disciples do, or how do they respond?
- ✧ In what ways does Jesus show power, and what is its impact?
- ✧ The writer of the excerpt defines what he believes is truly miraculous in Jesus' actions. How do you define the miraculous in these stories?

To transition to Responding, ask the group to read silently the "Now What?" excerpt. Ask participants to reflect on the following:

- ✧ The writer observes, "When placed in the hands of Jesus, human weakness and finitude become more than enough." What do you think is the relationship between the power revealed in the divine character and purposes of Jesus and the human frailties of those of us who call ourselves his disciples?

## RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session.

**1. Examination of Conscience** By using a spiritual practice for discernment, adults can reflect on their own role as disciples. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the "So What?" excerpt from Resource Sheet 1. Invite participants to identify one or two ministries of the church in which they are involved, and form small groups to evaluate each ministry. If there are adults who are not actively involved in one of the identified ministries, ask them to identify which ministry being considered is of most interest to them and join that group. Ask each group to discuss the following and designate one person to record the group's responses.

- ✧ What about this ministry is life giving?
- ✧ What about this ministry is life draining?

Invite group members to name ways they can discern that the ministry is fulfilling the purpose of revealing God's power. Encourage adults to continue to pray for discernment about their own current or potential roles in this ministry and how their discipleship might better reflect God's power. Close with a time of silent prayer. Pass on the evaluations to your pastor or a member of the church governing board.

2. **Put Yourself in the Boat** By engaging in an exercise where they enter the story, participants can clarify their role as followers of Jesus in uncertain or challenging circumstances. Follow the directions on Resource Sheet 2 (Put Yourself in the Boat) for the guided meditation. After meditation, discuss the questions. Encourage adults to make John 6:15–21 their Scripture reading in the coming week and ask them to reflect further on their own responses to the discussion questions.
3. **A Hymn about Discipleship** In grappling with the questions posed in a hymn about following Jesus, adults can clarify their own role as followers and identify aspects of discipleship that challenge their understandings. Distribute hymnals with the hymn, "Will You Come and Follow Me? (The Summons)." Ask your accompanist to play through one stanza of the hymn or play it from an Internet site. Point out that the first four stanzas pose questions, and the final stanza is a response. Invite the group to sing the four stanzas. Then ask participants to read through those stanzas silently, reflecting on the meaning of each question. Ask them to choose one or two of the questions that pose the biggest challenge for them as disciples. Distribute pens and paper and invite them to write a short reflection about what makes the question a challenge, as well as a step or two they will commit to taking to begin to explore that challenge. Sing the final stanza as an affirmation of commitment. Encourage participants to take home their reflection for further thought and action.

## CLOSING

Remind the group of their responses in the activity in Gathering to the open-ended prompt. Invite them to respond to the following: In the church today, I see signs of Jesus' power in . . .

Pray the following:

*God of grace, grant us the eyes to see your power. Grant us the will to witness to that power as disciples of your son Jesus, whose life and ministry revealed that power. Amen.*

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for August 2, 2015, or e-mail it to the participants during the week. Encourage participants to read the focus scripture and Resource Sheet 1 before the next session.

## Focus on John 6:1–21

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## Put Yourself in the Boat

*Invite the group to find a comfortable position for sitting and close their eyes. Ask them to imagine they are one of Jesus' disciples.*

Today started routinely enough. Along with Jesus, your rabbi, you and the other disciples had gone to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. Your teacher was tired and in need of some time apart from the crowds that seek him out so relentlessly. But after you trudged up the mountain together and sat down, Jesus saw that a very large crowd had followed you.

Jesus put the question to Phillip: "Where are we going to buy food for these people to eat?"

What followed inspires fresh awe in you as you think back: in the face of literally thousands of hungry people and impossibly small resources, Jesus fed the people. When he saw that they were intent on making him king, he withdrew again to the mountain.

But when evening came, you and the other disciples got in a boat on the sea, bound for Capernaum. And now, the wind is up, blowing strong across the water and raising waves. Your exhaustion and the dark, coupled with the rough water, are making for a difficult crossing. And then through the dark, you get a glimpse of something out across the water. At first the image is unclear—then, as it approaches the boat, you can see something that almost stops your breath. It is Jesus, walking on the surface of the rough sea near the boat. Nothing has prepared you for this, and you are terrified!



And then his voice, reassuring: "It is I, do not be afraid." You stretch out your arms, urging him to climb into the boat with you. But suddenly, you are aware that you have reached land.

Invite the group to reflect on the following:

- As you seek to define more clearly your role in Christ's mission, reflect on how you seek to encounter Jesus. In what spiritual practices do you regularly engage so that your eyes are open to recognizing where Jesus has come to meet you and to discern where God is at work in the world?
- What are your uncertainties about your role in God's mission? What are your fears? Have there been times when you have been paralyzed by the fury of the storm instead of seeking to recognize Jesus accompanying you? If so, what did you do?
- In considering your own call, have there been times when you felt powerless in the face of the demands of discipleship? What was the situation, and how did you respond?