

"Think Different" was an advertising slogan for Apple Computers.

But it's also a good slogan for the Gospel According to John.

John is often different. Case in point, there is no first Eucharist in the Gospel of John.

In Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians, Jesus gathers with his disciples on the night before he dies. It is a Passover meal. It is the Last Supper.

Jesus takes some of the elements of a Passover meal and gives them new meaning. He takes bread and says, "This is my body." He takes a cup of wine and says, "This is my blood." It is the first Eucharist. And Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians tell all about it.

But not John. In John, Jesus and his disciples have supper on the night before he dies. But in John, there's no mention made of anything Eucharistic at that Last Supper. Jesus does many other things at that meal in John. But there's no account of the institution of Communion. There's no first Eucharist.

Why would John do that? Why omit the Eucharist? Wasn't the Eucharist one of the most important things for the early church? Does John not think Communion is important?

In actuality, John definitely thinks the Eucharist is important. John thinks it's so important that he writes an enormous amount about it. In fact, John spends more time on Eucharistic theology than Matthew, Mark, and Luke combined. But John does it in a different place.

John doesn't talk about Eucharist in the context of the Passover the night before Jesus is killed. His audience probably knew that story and heard every time they celebrated Communion. "On the night before he died, he took bread..." So John doesn't mention the Eucharist in the context of that Passover meal.

Instead, John talks about the meaning behind communion a year earlier, on the Passover that falls a year before Jesus' death.

We find that Passover in chapter 6 of John. John talks about Communion, about Eucharist in the context of the feeding of the 5,000, and Jesus' teachings the next day.

This week, then for 4 weeks in August, we have Gospel lessons from John 6. Jesus' words in John 6 are of incredible spiritual importance. And they say more about the essence of the Eucharist than any other part of scripture. And today, as a prelude, we hear about the feeding of the 5,000.

Besides the Resurrection, the feeding of the 5,000 is the **ONLY** miracle that appears in all 4 Gospels. That must mean that it was of central importance to the early Christians. It's also big at St. Paul's—it's our #3 window (3rd from the back on the north side of the building).

Last week in our Gospel reading from Mark, Mark told us of what happened right before the feeding of the 5,000. Mark gave us a run-up. Jesus was trying to get away with his disciples to debrief their recent experiences. They headed in a boat to another part of the Lake of Galilee. But the crowd pursued them.

And Jesus could have told the crowd to go away. He needed some quality private time with his disciples after all.

Or Jesus could have gotten annoyed. He could have scolded the crowd for bothering him.

But he didn't. Mark tells us that Jesus responded with compassion. In Mark's words, "As (Jesus) went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things."¹

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He cares deeply for his sheep. And so he spends the afternoon teaching the crowd. But then evening is approaching, and they're off in a rather remote area.

And that's where we pick up this week.

It's dinnertime. And Jesus takes the initiative and asks his disciple Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?"²

John tells us that Jesus is testing Philip. Jesus already knows what he is planning to do.

Philip gives a conventional and superficial answer: "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."³

Andrew is also thinking conventionally. He brings forth a boy who has 5 loaves and 2 fish, but then asks, "But what are they among so many people?"⁴

Both disciples are thinking of things in conventional terms. We don't have anywhere near enough money. We don't have anywhere near enough bread.

But they're not considering Jesus' power. So Jesus takes matters into his own hands, literally. He has the crowd sit down. John adds that it is in a grassy place. The Good Shepherd is trying to find good pasture for his sheep.

Then Jesus takes the loaves and gives thanks, then distributes them, along with the fish.⁵

¹ Mark 6:34

² John 6:5

³ John 6:7

⁴ John 6:8

⁵ John 6:11

And John says, all the people are satisfied. Jesus is able to fill them all, Jesus is able to satiate their physical hunger. And there were even 12 large baskets of bread fragments left over that they are able to collect.

And then John adds something unique. The people are impressed by what Jesus has done. They call Jesus a prophet.

They are basically saying: Jesus feeds us. He has power. So let's make him king and overthrow the Roman occupation government. This shows the people are thinking in conventional terms as well. And Jesus has to retreat before they seize him by force and make him their king.

Truth is, Jesus offers something more than earthly food, something deeper than earthly food. But the crowd is so fixated on this miracle that they miss the deeper meaning of what Jesus can truly offer them in their lives. More on that in subsequent weeks—Jesus will talk extensively about earthly food versus heavenly food, and the true nourishment that he offers as the bread of life.

But there's a second miracle in our Gospel lesson besides the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus retreats to the hills to pray, and the disciples start rowing across the lake. But then, a windstorm whips up, and they're in trouble. They're struggling.

But then, Jesus comes to them.⁶ He meets them where they are in the midst of their struggles. And he meets them by walking onto the surface of the lake, walking on the sea. John says the disciples were terrified. A sensible reaction.

But Jesus says something of enormous import: "It is I; do not be afraid."⁷ Even more literally, "I AM; do not be afraid."

I AM. Do not be afraid. The Greek phrase is "Ego eimi." It can be translated as "it's me," and at times in the New Testament, that's an appropriate translation. But ego eimi also can be translated as "I AM." And it appears that way many times in John. There are tons of I AM sayings:

I AM the true vine.⁸

I AM the light of the world.⁹

I AM the good shepherd.¹⁰

I AM the resurrection.¹¹

⁶ John 6:19

⁷ John 6:20

⁸ Jn 15:1

⁹ Jn 8:12

¹⁰ Jn 10:7

I AM the way, the truth and the life.¹²

And as we'll hear later in chapter 6 in August: I AM the bread of life.¹³

Ego eimi doesn't just mean "it's me." Ego eimi also means "I AM."

Jesus is not walking up to the boat on top of the water and saying, "Hey guys, it's me." He's saying, "I AM, do not be afraid."

Of course, good Jews would know of another who used the title, "I AM." And that is God himself. And whenever God would make an appearance, one of the first things that he would say is, "Do not be afraid."

If that's not enough, there is someone in the OT who is said to walk on the sea. Again, that is God himself.

John wants us to connect the dots. John loves his symbolism. And he wants us to look past the surface of what he's saying to see the deeper meaning underneath.

The meaning of this 2nd miracle is clear: Jesus is God. Jesus is speaking like God speaks. And Jesus doing what only God can do.

I AM. Do not be afraid.

The waves are high, the winds are strong, the water is rough, life is risky. But be brave, I AM. There is a power in the universe even greater than the power of nature. I AM; do not be afraid.

AND, AND, AND, don't miss the common theme of these two miracles in John.

Philip and Andrew look at feeding thousands of people and think in terms of limited money and limited bread. They're thinking in conventional terms.

Later the disciples are on the water, and they're worrying about wind and waves and trying to struggle against them. Again, conventional terms.

And when they see Jesus walking on the water, they think in conventional terms—regular people don't do this, so be afraid, be very afraid.

But Jesus is going to ask them to stretch, to start thinking outside the box, to start thinking in spiritual terms. Jesus is asking them, as Apple says, to "Think Different."

¹¹ Jn 11:25

¹² Jn 14:6

¹³ Jn 6:35

If Jesus is who he says he is, then conventional thinking needs to go out the window. If Jesus has the power he seems to have, then conventional fears also need to go out the window.

We'll have 4 more readings from John 6. In the next 3 weeks, Jesus is going to try to stretch our spiritual envelopes. And in the 4th week, he'll ask us if we're going to live in a different way because of who he is.

For now, John is asking us to begin to think differently because of who Jesus is.

Don't let the waves of life intimidate you. JESUS IS; don't be afraid.

Step outside the conventional box, and think different.