witness from faith for faith; but for John, it is the witness of faith to the historical significance of Jesus' mission and person.

6:1–71 Jesus, the Bread of Life: Signs at Passover

The feeding of the five thousand and Jesus' discourse on the bread of life draw on the biblical account of God's provision of manna for the people of Israel, thereby presenting Jesus as the true "bread from heaven" who gives life to the world. Even as God provided manna for Israel in the wilderness, so God now provides the "bread from heaven" that grants eternal life. While Jesus' discourse looks back to God's provision of heavenly manna for his people, it may also allude to a promise found in Jewish literature anticipating the return of manna from on high in the age to come. The narrative of God's provision for Israel in the past and the anticipation of God's blessings in the future are both reconfigured in Jesus and his life-giving work for all the world. This work climaxes in Jesus' death and resurrection; it is remembered by his followers as they eat the Lord's Supper. Jesus' action is presented in John not merely as a deed in the past, but also as an act that was further explicated by, although not limited to, eating and drinking (the Lord's Supper) together, where those who eat and drink remember that they are still fed by Jesus. Even as God fed the Israelites in the wilderness, so God continues to sustain his people.

The narrative of Jesus' "walking on the water," or crossing the sea, lies between the account of the feeding of the multitudes and the discourse on the bread of life. In this account, Jesus comes to the disciples struggling in crossing the lake, and when they do not first recognize him, speaks the reassuring words identifying himself to them: "It is I" (*egō eimi*). This simple self-identification anticipates the first of Jesus' characteristic "I am" sayings in the Gospel ("I am the bread of life," 6:35).[62] Echoing patterns of divine speech in the Old Testament, this group of sayings underscores the identity of Jesus as the one who lives and remains with his people, and through whom the one sovereign God's life-giving work is accomplished.

But just as the Israelites murmured and grumbled, even after God had delivered them, so in his long discourse Jesus' claims to give God's life to the world provoke increased murmuring and grumbling about him (6:41, 60). Their grumbling increases the more that Jesus focuses on his identity as the means of receiving God's life, and on the necessity of his death in his life-giving work (6:41, 52), leading even many of Jesus' own followers to abandon him (v. 66). The chapter sounds a final ominous note when, for the first time, it mentions

62. John 6:35; 8:12; 9:5; 10:7, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1. See Excursus 5: "The 'I Am' Sayings of John."

"the Twelve" (v. 67), but also indicates that one from among this chosen group will betray Jesus (v. 70).

While Jesus' work aims to bring life to the whole world, the more that Jesus speaks of his heavenly origins, presents himself as the means and source of eternal life, and asserts the need to "eat and drink" his body and blood, the more offensive people find him. Jesus' claims may sound familiar to Christian readers accustomed both to thinking of Jesus as God's Son "come down" from heaven and to hearing the "words of institution" at the Lord's Supper, but John portrays them as divisive when uttered by Jesus to his contemporaries. Thus what transpires in this chapter again echoes the prologue's assertion that the one who was life and light for all the world was received by some and rejected by others. Never abandoning God's commitment to Israel, the Gospel constantly portrays the scope of God's work on a cosmic canvas. The one promised in the Scriptures (1:45), the King of Israel (1:49), is the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29).

6:1–15 The Feeding of the Five Thousand

The narrative of the feeding of the five thousand appears in all four Gospels. Although sometimes referred to as a "nature miracle," Jesus' action is more aptly characterized, along with the transformation of the water to wine, as a miracle of "gift" or "supply."[63] In this category, it belongs among the works of the prophets such as Elijah and Elisha, who generously supplied meal, oil, and bread to those in need. No wonder John depicts the people acclaiming Jesus as a prophet (6:14). But the sign is misunderstood: John reports that, in response to what they have seen, the crowd wants to "seize Jesus to make him king." Since Jesus' act has demonstrated his ability to provide for his people, it is not surprising that they are eager for him to take up the role of king, continue to provide for them, and perhaps do even more than that. And while, in the Gospel of John, Jesus is a king, his authority comes not from human beings, but from God. Hence, the shape of his kingship is not determined by any human agenda, but by God's life-giving purposes for the world. Precisely for that reason he feeds those who hunger.

6:1 Then[a] Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, or Tiberias.[b]
2 A large crowd followed him, because they saw the signs that he did on
those who were sick. **3** And Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he
sat down with his disciples. **4** Passover, a festival of the Jews, was near. **5**
When Jesus saw the large crowd coming to him, he said to Philip, "Where
shall we buy bread in order that they may eat?" **6** He said this to test Philip;
for he already knew what he was going to do.

63. Theissen 103–6.

7 Philip answered, "Two hundred denarii of bread would not be enough
for each of them to have just a little."
8 Then one of the disciples, Andrew the brother of Simon Peter, said
to him, 9 "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish.
But what are these for so many?"
10 Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." There was a lot of grass in
that place. The men who sat down numbered five thousand.
11 Jesus took the bread and, having given thanks, distributed it to those
sitting down; likewise also the fish, as much as they wanted. 12 And when
they were filled, Jesus said to his disciples, "Gather up the pieces that are
left over, so that nothing may be lost." 13 They gathered them up and filled
twelve baskets with pieces from the five barley loaves, left by those who
had eaten.
14 So when the people saw the sign[c] that he had done, they said, "This
is truly the prophet who is coming into the world!" 15 Jesus, knowing that
they were going to come and seize him in order that they might make him
king, withdrew again to the mountain alone.

a. *Meta tauta*, "after these things"; cf. John 3:22; 5:1, 14; 6:1; 7:1; 19:38; 21:1; the singular *meta touto* occurs in 2:12; 11:7, 11; 19:28. The phrase "after these things" does not indicate how long or short the lapse of time between the events.

b. Lit., "the Sea of Galilee of Tiberias" (*tēs thalassēs tēs Galilaias tēs Tiberiados*). To avoid the awkward reading with two genitives referring to the same sea, some MSS omit "of Tiberias" (cf. "sea of Tiberias" in 21:1); others read "of Galilee and Tiberias"; still others, "of Galilee in the regions of Tiberias." The troublesome double genitive (as in $\mathfrak{P}^{66c, 75}$ A B) is likely original.

c. Although most MSS have a singular ("the sign that he had done"), some (including $\mathfrak{P}^{75}$ and B) read "the signs that he had done," probably in assimilation to the plural in 6:2 (see also 2:23).

[6:1–6] The scene is set on "the other side" of the Sea of Galilee, or Tiberias.[64] Even as the Gospel jumps over large periods of time in order to correlate Jesus' work with significant festivals of the Jewish calendar, so now it has moved from Jerusalem (ch. 5) to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (6:1).[65] That it was "near Passover" presumably indicates a passage of time since the previous Passover (2:13, 23). John calls Passover a "festival of the Jews."[66]

64. John is unique in the NT in referring to the sea (or lake) of Galilee as "Tiberias" (6:1, 23; 21:1), but Josephus calls it *hē pros Tiberiada limnē* (*J.W.* 3.57) and *hē Tiberieōn limnē* (*J.W.* 4.456). For names of the sea in ancient Jewish, Greek, and Christian sources, see Freyne, "Galilee, Sea of," *ABD* 2:899–900.

65. On John's use of the feasts to provide the chronological framework for this Gospel, see the discussion of John's structure in the introduction to this commentary.

66. On Passover, see also the notes and comments at 2:13; 19:14.

While Passover commemorates God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, it is actually God's provision of manna during the wilderness wanderings, after the departure from Egypt, that provides the literary and theological context for Jesus' interpretive discourse in this chapter.

A crowd follows Jesus "because they saw the signs that he did" (6:2). Whether this statement refers to Jesus' signs in Galilee (2:1–11; 4:46–54) or in Jerusalem (5:1–9), it indicates that Jesus' reputation as a miracle worker is bringing "a large crowd" to him (cf. 2:23, 25; 4:45; see also 4:46–47; 5:15). John's account underscores both Jesus' initiative in feeding the crowd and his abundant provision for them: he goes up on the mountain;[67] sits down; sees the multitudes; and in order to "test" (*peirazō*) Philip, asks how he and his disciples are to feed them. Although often in the New Testament *peirazō* (or its related noun) carries the negative connotation of "tempt, trap, entice, or lead astray" (e.g., Matt 4:1, 3; 6:13; 1 Cor 7:5), here it means to "examine, try, prove" (e.g., 2 Cor 13:5; Jas 1:2–4). Jesus "tests" Philip to see whether he understands what Jesus is able and willing to do, so that Philip may see and understand Jesus rightly.

[7–9] The disciples' responses underscore their meager resources, five barley loaves and two fish, and the great need: two hundred days' wages, the value of two hundred denarii, would scarcely buy enough food for all the people. While the disciples see the need, they think their resources are too slight to help; they do not understand that Jesus can provide abundantly beyond what they imagine. This brief narrative echoes and trumps the story in 2 Kgs (4:42–44) where, in spite of his servant's doubts, Elisha feeds a hundred people with twenty loaves of barley,[68] with bread left over. Jesus feeds thousands, and there is an abundance left over.

[10–13] Again Jesus takes the initiative, ordering the people to sit down and distributing bread and the fish to them. Jesus is the host at this meal, even as he became the (unseen) host of the wedding feast at Cana by providing wine for it. After distributing the bread, Jesus commands that the pieces be gathered up "so that nothing may be lost," and his disciples do as they are bidden.[69]

Several points are notable in this brief narrative. First, Jesus prays ("having given thanks," 6:11) before distributing the bread and fish, perhaps in keeping with the Jewish prayer of thanksgiving: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth" (*m. Ber.* 6:1).

67. Which "mountain" is not specified; cf. John 6:15; Mark 6:46; Matt 15:29.

68. *Artous krithinous* (2 Kgs 4:42 LXX). A staple of the ancient Mediterranean diet, barley was less expensive than wheat (cf. 2 Kgs 7:16) and sometimes associated with the poor by Roman and Jewish authors alike; see Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 18.74; Josephus, *J.W.* 5.427; on the use of barley and wheat, see Garnsey.

69. For the distinctive Johannine note that Jesus does not lose any of those God has given to him, see 6:39; 17:12; 18:9.

Second, John's description reflects the words spoken over the bread and cup at the Lord's Supper as recorded elsewhere: "And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them" (Luke 22:17–19; Matt 26:26–27; Mark 14:22–23; 1 Cor 11:24). Although Jesus here distributes bread and fish (cf. 21:9), he will go on to speak of eating and drinking (v. 35) his flesh and blood (vv. 51–58) and eventually will mention the one who will betray him (cf. 1 Cor 11:23, "on the night when he was betrayed"). Jesus' provision of bread foreshadows his giving of his flesh in death (6:51).

Third, the five loaves and two fishes (v. 9) spectacularly contrast with the leftover twelve baskets of bread (v. 13) recalling the abundant provision of wine in John 2:1–12: from six stone jars of water, Jesus provides far more wine than the wedding guests require. The "twelve baskets" call to mind the twelve tribes of Israel, now reconfigured in the twelve disciples, representative of Jesus' followers (cf. 6:67). All the scattered children of God will be gathered together (11:5; 17:21–22); none of them will be lost (6:39; 10:28–29; 17:12): there will be "one flock, one shepherd" (see comments on 10:12–16; 11:52; 17:21–22).

In its prayer of thanksgiving over the Eucharist, the early Christian catechetical document the *Didache* (late first or early second c.) also interprets it in terms of the feeding miracle and, further, as the gathering of the church into one: "Even as what was broken was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom" (9.4; 10.5).[70] In John, the feeding miracle also serves as a figure of the Lord's Supper and of the gathering of God's people. Jesus gave his body and blood to gather his people together; hence, even as the bread is scattered, so must it be gathered; even as there are many pieces, there is also one loaf (cf. 1 Cor 10:14–17; 11:27–34).

Finally, Jesus' feeding of the five thousand foreshadows his provision of bread and fish to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias after his resurrection (21:1–13). As Jesus fed the multitude in the wilderness, so the risen Lord feeds his disciples (10:9–10; 21:12–13). Once again, the Gospel of John draws a parallel between the experiences of those who are with Jesus during his earthly ministry and those who will follow him after his resurrection (e.g., cf. 1:43 and 21:19, 22). The same Lord provides for his own.

[14–15] Having seen the sign, the people hail Jesus as the coming prophet (6:14), most likely referring to the expectation of a prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15–18; cf. John 1:21–25; 4:19; 6:32; 7:40). The transition from prophet (6:14) to king (v. 15) can perhaps be explained by the designation of Moses as both prophet and king in Jewish tradition, though it may also link hopes for two

70. The *Didache* (9–10) and the *birkat ha-mazôn* ("blessing for the nourishment") of the Passover meal draw on different parts of Sir 36:10–23; see discussion in Skarsaune 406–13.

messianic figures in Jesus.[71] Jesus is both prophet, one who speaks God's truth, and king, the "anointed" one (see 1:41, 49; 4:19, 29, 44; 7:40–41).[72]

Also relevant here are Josephus's accounts of men such as Theudas (*Ant.* 20.97–98) and "the Egyptian" (*Ant.* 20.168–70). Both claimed to be prophets; Josephus judges both as deceivers. He similarly criticizes a number of figures that, in one way or another, sought royal power or honors, because they improperly seized kingship or exercised "tyrannical power."[73] While all these movements either dissipated on their own or were put down by the Romans, each seemed to have exercised some hold over the popular imagination. John's statements that the crowds take Jesus for a prophet and want to "make him king" portray altogether predictable responses in this first-century context. Jesus is implicitly contrasted with those who deceive others and with their self-aggrandizing aspirations.

Jesus withdraws from the crowd because his authority and kingly office come not "from himself" or from the eager and restive crowd, but from God (18:33–36; 19:11). The crowd's desire to make Jesus king "is not faith, but unbelief. They have not understood who Jesus is."[74] Jesus did not make himself equal to God (5:1–18); he will not make himself king. At the triumphal entry, Jesus will receive the acclamations of the crowd who hail him as "King of Israel" (12:13, 15), but the road through Jerusalem leads to the cross, and only in that way to a throne and scepter—a path that the crowd clamoring to crown Jesus could scarcely have imagined.

6:16–21 A Revelation of Jesus' Identity

The surprisingly terse account of Jesus' walking on the lake follows the note that Jesus has withdrawn "to the mountain alone" (6:15). The disciples are without their leader, and for a time Jesus is the "great Absent One" in the story.[75] When Jesus comes to them, his presence first elicits fear because they

71. On Moses as prophet, see Hos 12:13; Wis 11:1; *L.A.B.* 35.6, "first of all the prophets"; *T. Mos.* 11.16, "divine prophet for the whole earth"; Philo, *Mos.* 1.175; 2.187, 292; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.329. For Moses as ruler or king, see *L.A.B.* 9.16; 20.5; Philo (*Mos.* 1.334; 2:2–7) refers to Moses' royal, prophetic, and priestly offices; see also *Mos.* 2.187, 292; *Praem.* 53; Josephus, *Ant.* 4.327; Meeks 1967; Hylen 2005.

72. Since kings were anointed, the promised future king who would deliver Israel became known as "the anointed one," that is, "the Messiah," where Messiah translates the Hebrew and Aramaic words for anointed; see comments on 1:41 and 12:3.

73. Regarding those who claimed power for themselves, see Josephus on Judas (of Sepphoris, Galilee; *Ant.* 17.271–72; *J.W.* 2.56); Simon of Perea (*Ant.* 17.273–76; *J.W.* 2.57); and Athronges, the shepherd of Judea (*Ant.* 17.278). For those who exercised "tyranny," see *J.W.* 4.389–93 on John of Gischala; and on Simon bar Giora of Gerasa, *J.W.* 2.652; 4.508; 5.11; 7.32.

74. Newbigin 76.

75. Ridderbos 216.

do not recognize him until he identifies himself and speaks words of comfort. Jesus' presence is not always discerned: he must disclose himself in order to be recognized. And even though the storm is apparently not stilled, the disciples arrive safely to their destination.

6:16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, 17 got into
a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. And when it was dark[a]
and Jesus had not yet come to them, 18 the sea grew rough because a
great wind was blowing. 19 When they had been rowing about three or
four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near the boat,
and they were afraid. 20 And he said to them, "It is I. Do not be afraid."
21 Then they wanted to take him into the boat, but at once the boat was at
the land to which they were going.

a. Perhaps reflecting both John 1:5 and 12:35, some MSS (ℵ D) read *katelaben de autous hē skotia* ("darkness had overtaken them"), accenting the perilous character of the disciples' situation without Jesus.

[16–19] The account begins with the note that, at evening, the disciples started across the sea toward Capernaum, that it grew dark, and that "Jesus had not yet come to them": he had not rejoined them after withdrawing from the crowd (6:14–15). Yet the comment indicates that although Jesus was absent for a time, he will not remain so. John then sketches the plight of the disciples as they struggle, in Jesus' absence, to row across the sea under difficult conditions (vv. 16–19).[76] The darkness, the stormy sea, and the distance that the disciples have rowed emphasize the obstacles in the way of Jesus' being present with the disciples. When Jesus does come to them, the disciples are terrified (v. 19): they do not know who is walking across the sea to meet them. Indeed, why should they? Why should they expect Jesus or anyone else to meet them in the midst of the lake?

[20–21] Jesus identifies himself to the disciples with the simple words "It is I" and encourages them, "Do not be afraid." "It is I" or "I am" translates the Greek *egō eimi*, which can be a simple way of identifying oneself to another; hence, the blind man acknowledges that he is the person "who used to sit and beg" with *egō eimi* (9:9; cf. 4:26; 18:5, 8).[77] Jesus thus reassures the disciples

76. The disciples are "about 25 or 30 stadia" out to sea; one stadium = ⅛ of a Roman (or English) mile = about 600 Greek, 625 Roman, or 607 English feet = 192 meters (see BDAG; LSJM). Today the lake is 8 by 13 miles (Rousseau and Arav 246); these measurements differ significantly from Josephus's report that the lake is 40 by 140 stadia (4.5 by 15.6 miles; *J.W.* 3.506). Rousseau and Arav also (246) describe winds that can roil the lake, raising waves of 6–7 feet.

77. Asahel responds to Abner's question, "Is it you, Asahel?" with *egō eimi* (2 Sam 2:20 LXX; MT, *ʾānōkî*). See Excursus 5: "The 'I Am' Sayings of John."

that they have not seen a ghost or apparition, but Jesus himself: since he is no longer absent from them, but now with them, they need not be afraid.

But in Scripture, God frequently encourages his people with the words "Do not be afraid," often grounding them in the promise of his presence (Gen 15:1; 26:24; Isa 41:10; Jer 1:8). God's people are not to fear because God is and will be with them. Surely the one who has just walked across the waves of the stormy sea can now be understood to be speaking as God has spoken, promising his anxious disciples his protective presence. But curiously, the disciples do not respond with wonder or worship: they are simply willing to take him into the boat. For now, they recognize Jesus, and they welcome his presence in their midst. Fuller recognition of who he is, Lord and God, will come after the resurrection (20:28).

John enigmatically reports that the boat reaches the shore immediately. Here it is not clear whether Jesus gets into the boat (cf. Matt 14:32; Mark 6:51). A number of patristic commentators believed that Jesus does not since the boat is immediately at its destination: a point thought to heighten the miraculous character of this event in John's narrative.[78] Others thought that, in keeping with his divine nature, Jesus continues on the sea to the shore.[79] Still others assume that Jesus gets into the boat, demonstrating that Jesus' presence with the disciples ensures their safe arrival at their destination.[80] Following this last suggestion, one hears echoes of Ps 107:28–30: "Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven." Like the psalmist, John describes the distress and trouble of God's people on the sea, and then their arrival at a safe haven.[81] Like Isaiah, John pictures Jesus as the Lord who is with his disciples when they "pass through the waters" (Isa 43:2), who "makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters" (43:16; Ps 77:19; cf. Job 9:8).

Curiously, given the potential of the Old Testament allusions for depicting Jesus in terms of God's own actions, John remains remarkably silent on the meaning of Jesus' walking across the sea. John does not call Jesus' crossing the sea "a sign," although like the signs it demonstrates God's deliverance of those in need. But clearly, walking across the sea manifests Jesus' identity as the one who is with his disciples in the most perilous of situations: he will not

78. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on John* 3.6.21; on John 6:21, cf. Bultmann 1971; Moloney 1996.

79. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Jo.* 43.1. If Jesus is presumed not to have gotten into the boat, the point may be that he traversed the entire sea *on* the water, whereas the Israelites, led by Moses, crossed the Red Sea on land that had been *beneath* the water, on dry ground (though this would not aptly characterize the disciples' sea crossing).

80. Ridderbos 218; Schnackenburg 2:27.

81. There is no explicit mention that the wind ceases, as in Matt 14:32; Mark 6:51.

abandon his disciples; he will come to them (14:18) and bring them safely to their destination (14:2–3).

6:22–34 Bread from Heaven

After eating their "fill of the loaves" (6:26), the people now want more: more bread, more miracles, more of what Jesus can offer. They follow him across the sea, looking for more of what he has given them earlier, bread that fed them for a day. When they find Jesus, he redirects their quest to a different kind of bread, bread that will feed them for eternal life. Even as the Samaritan woman asked for the living water that Jesus can give, not understanding that he was speaking to her of the gift of the Spirit, so now the people ask for Jesus "always" to give them the "bread of God" that "comes down from heaven" and "gives life to the world" (vv. 33–34). They are right to ask for it; but they do not yet understand what Jesus wants to give them. That remains to be explained further.

[6:22] On the next day, the crowd that had remained on the other side of the
sea saw that there was no other boat there,[a] and that Jesus had not entered
the boat together with his disciples, but that only his disciples had gone
away. 23 Other boats from Tiberias came near the place where they had
eaten the bread after the Lord had given thanks. 24 So when the crowd
saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into
the boats and went to Capernaum, looking for Jesus. 25 And when they
found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when
did you come here?"

26 Jesus answered them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, you seek me, not
because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. 27 Do
not work for the food that perishes, but rather for the abiding food that
gives eternal life, which[b] this Son of Man will give to you. For the Father,
God,[c] has set his seal on him." 28 They said to him, "What should we do
in order to work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered them, "This is the
work of God: believe in that one whom he sent."

30 They said to him, "So what sign will you do, that we might see and
believe in you? What work will you do? 31 Our ancestors ate manna in
the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"
32 Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who
gave you bread from heaven, but my Father is giving you the true bread
from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down[d] from
heaven and gives life to the world." 34 They said to him, "Lord, give us
this bread always."

a. Lit., "no other boat there except one" (*allo ouk ēn ekei ei mē hen*), perhaps the one the disciples have used.