

Reflections on John 6:16-21

[Read John 6:16-21 here \[external webpage\]](#)

In the verses prior to our reading, John tells us that the crowd had started following Jesus because ‘...they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick’. Then, following Jesus’ feeding of the five thousand, they become convinced that he was a prophet in the tradition of Moses - a prophet/leader who was able to communicate directly with God and, therefore, whose commands need only to be obeyed, and they would be restored to the land of promise. A land of peace. A land of plenty.

John tells us that this hope, framed within the crowds existing worldview, grew quickly into a vision of Jesus as a saviour king who would free them from the Roman invaders and restore them to the land. God’s kingdom on earth..., or so the common understanding of the day would have it.

This faith-view framed Jesus as a certain kind of teacher and a certain type of leader – giving rise to a particular hope and a particular set of expectations. But when these hopes and expectations failed to materialize, Jesus, many concluded, wasn’t worth following after all.

For the twelve disciples, however, their experience on the lake framed Jesus altogether differently. The disciples experienced Jesus not as one *like* Moses, but as the ‘I Am’ whom Moses had encountered in the burning bush - The One who is immanent in all and transcendent above all. A point John doubles down on by narrating Jesus’ dominion over the elements and his power to drive out fear.

The disciples embodied encounter on the lake frames Jesus in such a way that when Jesus later asks them, ‘why do you not leave me?’, they reply: ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life.’ The disciples experience had framed Jesus in such a fashion that to search for meaning, purpose, hope and wisdom anywhere else, would have been foolish. There was, therefore, nowhere else for the disciples to go.

That the disciples in their day, and we in ours, encounter The One who is the source of all meaning, purpose, hope and wisdom, as The One who simultaneously breathes words of comfort – I Am: do not be afraid – is the source of all peace and joy. Now and for evermore. Amen.