

No, No, Not Me: Peter's Story

Based on John: 18:12-27

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The Disciple: It happened last night... just a few hours ago, and surely all of Jerusalem has heard the news by now. We were in the garden with Jesus, praying with him. Trying to pray, anyway, but we were so tired. It had been a long night.

We gathered for the Passover supper close to sunset, and it was a curious gathering – unlike any other. It started out in typical ways. Peter was telling the story of Lazarus dying and Jesus bringing him to life... again... for about the 20th time, and the others were just talking and laughing. Passover is a holy night for us Jews, but among our friends, there is also laughter and teasing. We loved being with Jesus – he was becoming known throughout the land, and everywhere we went people followed us. Jesus was doing something new, and we were a part of it. Our names and our faces were associated with him.

At the supper last night, Jesus noticed that our feet had gone unwashed, dirty from the day's walking. We usually wash our feet as we enter the room, before reclining for our meal, but we were excited - -it had been a long week. So, when Jesus noticed our filthy feet, he stood up from the table, got a bowl of water and washed our feet. The room went silent..., except for Peter, of course. What was Jesus doing??? Our lord and our master, doing the work of a common servant?

And then, at supper, Jesus got to preaching...really, that man can TALK, and told us that he was going away, that we were to remember him, that an advocate would come to us...nothing that was particularly new, but it all seemed so strange. The words were charged with the feeling of finality – as though they were his last. Then Jesus said three words that I will never forget...love one another. “I give you a new commandment...love one another. “

Judas jumped up abruptly and left the table and our circle. He was tired of waiting around for Jesus to seize power. From where I sat, it looked as if Jesus and Judas argued, though they were quiet. We had no idea where he was going.

After supper we headed to the garden at Gethsemane, just over the valley. It was there the soldiers found us – and Judas was leading them – with that stubborn look on his face. We knew that they were looking for our Lord and panicked. We tried to figure out a way to hide Jesus or to run. But we were stuck.

Jesus, composed as he usual, asked who the soldiers were looking for and stepped into their hands. No arguing, no yelling or resisting. In the confusion, as they were making the arrest, Peter – why is it always Peter – took his sword and cut off the ear of one of soldiers. Oh, Jesus didn't like that – and told Peter so.

As the soldiers took Jesus from the garden, the disciples fled...to their homes, to the hills. They needed to get away, to hide – to be anywhere but there! Only Peter and I remained. I was scared, more scared than I'd ever been in my life, but how could I leave Jesus? He had shown me things about myself, about God, about life, that I could never have imagined. He taught me how to live, how our lives can make a difference.

Our quiet procession found its way to Annas' home – it was enormous. Annas was a high priest himself and father-in-law to Caiaphus, another Chief Priest. We disciples heard that Caiaphas declared that it would be better to have one person die for the Jews than to have the whole lot of us fall into chaos. Would they kill Jesus? This very night?

Because I know Annas, I was allowed into the courtyard with the soldiers while Peter waited outside. The night was cold, and so I went to the gatekeeper to ask her to let Peter in, too. At least he could warm his hands by the fire and oh, how I needed a friend.

Police: I was inside with Jesus, that troublemaker. Day after day, year after year, we heard stories of his disrespect for authority and seeing him in person, I know those reports were true. What does he take us for – fools? Who does he think he is, this carpenter who wanders around with his band of misfits? As far as I'm concerned, he is done upsetting law and order in this city.

A week ago the crowds were so large it was all we could do to contain the noise. Hosanna! Hosanna!

Where are your adoring fans now, Jesus? Up in that garden, when we arrived, they all fled for their lives. Cowards. We know who truly holds the power.

So when Annas asked about his disciples, and his teachings, do you know what this Jesus said? "I have spoken openly in public. I have taught regularly in meeting places and in the Temple, where all the Jews come together. Everything has been out in the open -- I have said nothing in secret. So why are you treating me like a conspirator? Question those who have been listening to me. They know well what I said. My teachings have all been aboveboard."

Oh, that enraged me...I simply couldn't take it anymore and I slapped him across the face. "Show some respect," I said, "How dare you speak to the Chief Priest like that?"

He thinks he's so clever, that Jesus, talking in riddles. Jesus replied, "If I've said something wrong, prove it. But if I've spoken the plain truth, why this slapping around?" Before I could lash out again, Annas cried, "Enough! No more – send him to Caiaphas."

Good. We've wasted enough of our time on this man.

Gatekeeper: While Jesus was inside with Annas, I was out in the cold at the gate of the courtyard. I am the servant of Annas' wife, and it is my job to let people into the courtyard by opening and shutting the door and then latching it. The door is large and heavy -- after a long night, my arms are leaden and achy.

I recognized Jesus, when he arrived with the soldiers. I had heard stories around the city of all the things he's been doing. My sister told me that once, at a party, he turned water into wine! What a trick! But then I heard that he'd fed thousands of people with just a child's portion of fish and bread, and made a blind man see and cured a sick child.

These stories are almost too marvelous to understand. Miracles of healing and feeding and raising the dead are not tricks...they are gifts from God.

A short while ago, I traveled to Bethany to see if I could see Jesus – or simply touch his robe. You see, my little Miriam is so sick – I knew he could help and felt it in my heart. This mother's heart worries, as my little one hasn't eaten in days and is wasting away to nothing. She is our only child, as two beautiful sons were lost in childbirth. When I got to Bethany, I could not get close to Jesus because so many were around him. I didn't know where to look in all the crowds. People were running and talking and there was much confusion because Jesus had restored Lazarus' life after he had been dead for days.

So, last night, as I was remembering and wondering how I could get to see Jesus, one of his friends approached me and asked if I would open the gate to let another man inside. I said, of course, for this is my job.

I strained to unlatch and open the gate, and as I opened it, I was surprised to see another one of Jesus' friends waiting to come in. I thought I recognized him from my time in Bethany – he was the man called Peter. When I let him into the courtyard, I asked him, "Aren't you one of Jesus' disciples?" He responded in a whisper and shake of his head,

“No, I’m not.” He looked nervous and I could see sweat on his brow, though it was a cold night.

I felt a chill go down my spine.

But I was sure this man was one of Jesus’ followers and so I watched him. Once in the courtyard, he hurried to the charcoal fire that the servants had built.

I shut the gate and latched it, but could barely feel the strain, as my interest was building. Perhaps if I could get closer to this man, he would tell me more about Jesus.

Making sure Peter didn’t see me, I crept over to the fire as the men began talking.

I heard one of them ask him, just as I had, “Aren’t you one of Jesus’ disciples?” Again, Peter said, “No...no. It wasn’t me.” He spoke more loudly this time and he was visibly shaking.

And then I wondered...where are Peter’s friends...the rest of the people who were close to Jesus? Is fear so great a force that they had to run, while Jesus is left alone in front of the Chief Priest?

The people around the fire talked about Jesus’ arrest and one looked at Peter and said, “You’re the one who cut off my brother’s ear. You *were* with Jesus - I saw you.” And again, tears streaming down his face, Peter fell to his knees and sobbed, “No, no, no, no, no – it wasn’t me.”

I ran to Peter as he wept, and threw my arms around this stranger. As his shoulders heaved, I found myself weeping, too. I held him, and I felt his pain, his anger, his fear - - right in my heart. Like he was my brother! I cried out to God in desperation for my sick daughter, my lost sons, and in lament for this world.

How long, O Lord? Will you forget us forever? As I was crying, as my heart opened to this man and to God, I prayed that I might trust in God’s promises, in the truth that God will deliver and all will be made new.

And then the most curious thing happened. The cock crowed. Three a.m.

The End