

A Epiphany Last
6 March 2011 St Michaels Studio City

John The Fisherman

That was the moment that I really began to believe.

You know, I'm just a fisherman, like my brother and like my father and my father's father. Fishing is what we know, not mountains and clouds and prophets. When He came by our fishing boat, I was tired but content. We had been fishing all night and God had blessed us with a pretty good catch. James was sorting the market fish from the trash fish, the first to be sold in the marketplace at Capernaum, the second to be sold to farmers for fertilizer. Our father was inspecting the boat for leaks to repair. I was mending the nets, finding the torn places, as my father had shown me as a boy, and carefully mending them with the strong twine my mother made. It was a good day, a happy day. And then Jesus came by.

I didn't see him at first, not until a shadow blocked the sun and I looked up into the most compelling face I had ever seen. He was just an average man, nothing special, not a fisherman I could tell from his skin, but still a workingman from the looks of His hands. But there was something about the way he held himself, as if you were standing next to a doorway into complete mystery, something about his eyes, as if He was looking deep into your soul. He spoke to all three of us in a voice at once strong, firm, and gentle. He said, "Come with me and I'll show you a different, better kind of fishing."

James' face flushed and he walked to Jesus as if in a trance. Our father hesitated, looked at the man, then at his fishingboat, and turned away to continue caulking the leaks. I... How can I explain it? I was pulled to him as if a net had been thrown over me and he was pulling me toward Himself. I was strangely drawn and at the same time terrified, terrified of a door opening into another world. But I went with Him, along with James. The terror never left me, all those months to follow, but I went with Him. He had the same effect on others. Lots of people left what they were doing and came to Him.

We went with Him for months. He seemed driven, on fire with a vision of God and a sense of urgency, as if there would not be enough time. He taught us wonderful things about God, healed so many sick people, even – I swear to God it's true – even brought some people back to life from death. There was so much; someday I will write it down so that others may come to know Him as we did.

But for me there was always the fear. He called it fishing for men and women, doing His Father's work. To me, it seemed so strange and threatening, meeting people with their souls exposed, calling them to a God that Jesus showed us was all Love, Love that caressed and commanded, Love that healed and demanded, Love that crooned and thundered, Love that was always there. I didn't understand people. I knew fish. I wanted to go back to what I knew. It was easier. It was simpler. It was what I knew.

Then came that day toward the end of it all. He left most of us down below, making camp, building fire, drawing water, resting after a hard day's walking. He took Peter and James and me with Him (I've always wondered why he took the three fishermen up on a mountain.) At the peak, he left us three to sit and rest, and walked away from us, as if, I later thought, to protect us. He stood away from us and prayed.

Now comes the hard part, to describe properly what happened, to tell you of something that words don't fit. But let me try. Suddenly, the world stopped. There was no sound, as if the world were holding its breath. We had been looking down onto the plain below, and it disappeared. It was like when fog used to descend on our boat and cut us off from everything around us. Nothing moved, nothing breathed. Then the thunder started, great crashing walls of sound from nowhere that seemed to shake the ground we fell to. It was thunder, but it was more. It was as if a million voices from heaven were shouting, singing: praise, glory, honor, power, might, love. Above it all, within the thunder and beyond it, was a Voice, deep, powerful, shaking the ground we lay on, a Voice which at first we could not decipher, could not make out the words. At last, it was as if the words were inside of us, not filling the air outside. Words beyond words, a meaning and power and presence that we had not heard before, like what Moses heard on Mount Sinai, words: Son, Beloved, My Own, Listen. The thundering sound went on and on; I was terrified and only wanted it to stop.

Automatically, we all three turned to the Lord, to Him who always was in control and sheltered us. At first we couldn't see Him, the fog was so thick. Then we began to see a glow, as if the sun were burning through the mist. The light grew stronger and stronger. To our amazement, we saw that the Light was the Lord. Jesus shone with the light of the sun itself, brilliant, blinding, yet not hurtful. My terror knew no bounds. I knew and trusted Jesus, but this... This was beyond strange. The only thing that kept my sanity was His face. It was the same, calm, loving, strong gentleness that had first drawn us to Him, the face we had known for all those months past. But I could take no more. I closed my eyes and covered my head and wished for the peace of death.

Only gradually did I become aware that the thunder had stopped, that the light no longer made red patterns through my tightly shut eyelids. Then, there was a touch on my shoulder. Hoping against hope, I opened my eyes and there was the Lord, as He had always been, one of us, a man, with strangely knowing eyes and a softly reassuring manner. He led us in silence and then stopped us halfway down the mountain, making us sit to hear him, teaching, as was our custom. He told us not to tell anyone of what had happened until after His death. He said that we would understand then. He said that this had happened to strengthen us for the time ahead, and it had happened to strengthen Him for what He must do. We did not understand that He was talking about His death and resurrection then, only later. He told us, not for the first time, that He would soon die and in His dying God would win a great victory. But He must die.

That was the moment I really began to believe. Isn't it strange that not all the incredible sights and sounds just past brought my doubt to its knees? Isn't it strange that it was simply the calm

statement of impending death and God's mysterious working, God's mysterious care, that finally broke through the fog of doubt. If Jesus could be all that I had just seen and heard and still speak of death and trust in God, then I could only surrender my own demand that God do things my way. I finally trusted what Jesus was saying. I finally believed that He was worthy of trust.

That was the moment I really began to believe. That's when I stopped fishing for fish and began fishing for women and men. And I have not been afraid since.