

The Rock ZCC 3/3/13

This monologue was done in full first-century costume and comes from many different scriptures. This one from John 18 may be an appropriate place to begin:

12 So the detachment, the commanding officer, and the officers of the Jews, seized Jesus and bound him, 13 and led him to Annas first, for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. 14 Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should perish for the people. 15 Simon Peter followed Jesus, as did another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered in with Jesus into the court of the high priest; 16 but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought in Peter. 17 Then the maid who kept the door said to Peter, "Are you also one of this man's disciples?" He said, "I am not." 18 Now the servants and the officers were standing there, having made a fire of coals, for it was cold. They were warming themselves. Peter was with them, standing and warming himself. 19 The high priest therefore asked Jesus about his disciples, and about his teaching. 20 Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues, and in the temple, where the Jews always meet. I said nothing in secret. 21 Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them. Behold, these know the things which I said." 22 When he had said this, one of the officers standing by slapped Jesus with his hand, saying, "Do you answer the high priest like that?" 23 Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken evil, testify of the evil; but if well, why do you beat me?" 24 Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas, the high priest. 25 Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said therefore to him, "You aren't also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it, and said, "I am not." 26 One of the servants of the high priest, being a relative of him whose ear Peter had cut off, said, "Didn't I see you in the garden with him?" 27 Peter therefore denied it again, and immediately the rooster crowed. (World English Bible)

I was born Simon of Bethsaida. I am a fisherman by trade and the son of Jona—who was a fisherman before me, as was his father. Most people call me Peter or Cephas or Petros because my LORD gave me the name "rock." Most of the time, the nearest I am to being a rock is because of my big hard head. Let me tell you how I met the Son of God and how I got my new name—and how I became a new person in Christ.

We were fishing, or we had been fishing. We were out all night, as usual—but on this night there had been no fish, not even one. We fished and fished—let out our nets and hauled them in—time and again, but all we caught was grass and slime.

We had come ashore and were washing and drying our nets when a noisy crowd came almost to the water's edge. They were following a man I had never seen. He was trying to talk to them, to teach them—but every time he stopped they would crowd around and all he would be shoved forward a few steps. I wondered if they were going to shove him in the water.

When he got near us, he motioned to me and asked me to take him out a little ways from shore so he could talk to the crowd. He seemed to expect me to do it and I was going to say "no" for that very reason—but when I opened my mouth, "yes" came out!

The sun was hot and I had worked hard with no sleep at all. I lay on the nets and half-listened—but I dozed several times. I did like his style and his attitude. He was not nearly as proud as most of the rabbis I had heard.

When he had finished, he told me to put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch. Obviously, he knew nothing about fishing. We fish at night. I'm as good a fisherman as you'll ever meet and I KNEW there were no fish to catch, so I told him so. With cocked eyebrow and tilted head, I said, "good master, we worked all night long and caught nothing at all—nonetheless, *at YOUR bidding*, I will let down the nets." I was going to get great pleasure out of saying, "I told you so!"

Really, we did it to make a point. I even wagged my head and silently mocked him as we were rowing out and rigging the nets. "Let down the nets" indeed! HA! As we began to haul back, I thought the net was hung. I knew of nothing there to snag on, but I pulled harder and finally began to make some headway. I couldn't imagine what was holding the net back. Then I caught a glimpse of silver scales flashing in the light.

FISH! Hundreds of FISH! I had never seen so many in a net, NEVER! Suddenly a mended place began to tear and I could just see all those fish getting away, but James a John saw the trouble and came to help. There were so many fish that we almost sunk BOTH boats. Impossible! Unbelievable! Couldn't happen!

When we got to shore, I begged him to get off my boat and leave us—leave our sinful presence. This man must be a prophet and we were rough tough fishermen who had little need for religion. I lived by my own abilities and by my own hands—I didn't need a crutch. Yet, these fish were the result of a miracle of some kind.

Instead of leaving, he turned and said that his name was Jesus and that he had work for us to do—that he wanted us to fish for men. I wasn't sure exactly what he meant, but I knew that he had SOMETHING that I needed—so the three of us went with him. We left the catch of a lifetime and the nets and boats we had made with our own hands. He said, "follow me." And we did. Before I met him, I knew everything and could do anything. Suddenly, I found myself in a different boat all together. In this kind of fishing, I knew nothing and could do nothing. I had always been so strong and so determined that I always got what I wanted. If it took effort, I'd give it. If it took more, I'd put out even more. I NEVER let anything get the best of me and I never quit—never! Pretty soon I learned that if I counted on myself now—I'd always fail.

He taught us more and more about the kingdom of God and I knew that I wanted to be a part of that! I was going to be SOMEBODY in his kingdom. Every king needs a bodyguard and that job suited my nature, I made myself Jesus' un-official body guard. Where he was, I was. I heard everything he said and saw everything he did. Pretty soon, I knew for sure that he was the Messiah that my people were looking for. I knew enough Scripture to know that he was going to be rich and powerful and that he was going to rule the world! I was one of his favorites—he even gave me a pet-name. He called me "Rock"—the name I told you about earlier. That name would come to haunt me.

See, all my life, I have been a show-off and a big-mouth—but one who always delivered. Those tendencies almost caused me to drown late one night.

There was a storm brewing in the distance when Jesus sent us ahead of him by boat. It looked like we could get across OK, but then the wind turned contrary and we couldn't sail. We were rowing for all we were worth when the storm caught us—right in the middle of the lake. We fought and fought the waves, but were not making any headway. In fact, it was beginning to look pretty bad for us.

Lightning was flashing non-stop. James shouted, “LOOK!” and pointed. We all looked and saw someone or something walking out there—in the middle of the lake! The rest of them cowered down, covering their faces with their hands—but I wasn’t going to miss something like this! I wiped the rain out of my eyes and clearly saw that it was the Master. Walking, just like always. Only on the water!

I don’t know why it even came out of my mouth. “Master, bid me come to you!”

He said, “All right, Peter, come on.” I didn’t think, I just did it. Step, step, step. Then I realized what I was doing. I looked around and saw the water in turmoil and I didn’t feel so brave and strong any more and I began to slowly sink into the water.

“Master, HELP ME!”

No longer was I thinking about what a story I was going to have to tell. No longer did I feel invincible. No longer could I look to Peter, the Rock. I had to admit my failure and reach out to him. I was drowning and he was standing there, reaching out to me—thank God!

When we got back to the boat, I expected him to scold me or even to laugh at my pitiful ness—but he didn’t. He told me that I had been doing very well and that I must have had faith to step out and begin that walk with him. He encouraged me to grow that faith—greater and greater.

He didn’t make fun, but they did. When we would get near the water, James and John would push and shove at me. “Go on ROCK, you walk out there and get the boat!” or something similar. At least that’s what they did when Jesus wasn’t looking.

When Jesus wasn’t teaching the crowds and healing the sick, he taught us. Sometimes, we would lie on the ground and talk. Once, he asked what the people were saying about him—who they said he was.

The others answered many things—Elijah, John the Baptist, or one of the other prophets. Then he asked, “Who do YOU say that I am?” No one else dared speak, so I answered, “You are the Christ.”

“Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jona—for God alone has revealed this to you.” Oh, my chest swelled up, you know it! Jesus went on to say a LOT of good things about me—when I didn’t think he had really noticed.

As the night wore on, he began to talk about dying. Well, the Messiah was NOT going to get killed when I was around! And I said so. He looked hurt and he looked at me like never before—“get behind me Satan...”

My heart almost tore itself out of my chest! I didn’t understand. As time went on, I found out that there was MUCH that I didn’t understand. I didn’t understand that his death was part of the plan and that God intended for Jesus to fall into the hands of the religious leaders and YES—to die! I didn’t understand how hard that was for him and how I was really tempting him to say “no” to the Father.

From then on, he taught like that—about his death and burial and resurrection—but I don’t think that any of us really understood. I know that I didn’t. We just heard what we wanted to hear.

Soon, it was clear that things were going to happen—that trouble was brewing. The Pharisees and Sadducees tried to gang up on him, confronting him about his teaching and his healing. They were at their worst in Jerusalem. We had little trouble elsewhere—in fact there was a lot of support all around Judea. We encouraged him to stay away from Jerusalem—especially after he raised our friend Lazarus from the dead. Once he had done that wonderful miracle, there were constant threats on his life. He definitely needed me for protection.

Where do you think he went? Right into the viper's pit—Jerusalem. I didn't want to go, but I HAD to go to watch over him and to keep him safe.

To my surprise, things were different than I expected. He rode into Jerusalem on a colt—just like the Messiah of Scripture. The people LOVED it. They cheered and they spread branches and even their cloaks on the ground for him to ride over. They shouted what I already knew—that Jesus was Messiah!

Well all right! This was definitely a good surprise! I knew all along that Jesus was a pessimist! Well, it MIGHT have worked out if it hadn't been for those money changers in the temple.

As soon as he saw them, he went right to work throwing them out. I never saw him act that way before. He was upset that they were cheating the pilgrims and that they were keeping foreigners and women from being able to worship. I would have helped, but he was doing just fine, thank you. What he didn't break, he scattered. I couldn't have done it better myself. I WAS surprised at how strong he was.

Even before he finished, I knew that we were going to be in BIG trouble. They were NOT going to stand for that.

Later that week, we had our Passover meal together. One of the first things he did was the work of a servant. He washed the dirt off of our feet. The Messiah, the Master, the Son of God! After that, he was painfully quiet. Then he blessed some bread, broke it and said that it was his broken body—he asked us to eat it. Then he blessed a cup of wine—his blood, he said—and asked us to drink of it. And to remember him. Strange request, I thought. Who could ever forget?

He spoke of a betrayer and then he looked at me and said that he was praying for me—that my strength and hardheadedness would not be enough for what lay ahead.

“Oh, no, “ I said proudly, “I will never leave you. No matter what the rest of the world does—you can always count on me!”

Then he said, “before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”

“No way! NEVER! I'll die WITH you if need be!” All the rest nodded their heads. We would stand and fight if we had to.

Then he looked at me and said, “when you have come to yourself—strengthen your brothers.”

We went to the Mount of Olives to pray. We were all tired and sleepy, but we made our way to Jesus' favorite praying spot. He asked James, John, and me to watch as he prayed. He caught us sleeping three times. We were going to always be there—but we couldn't even stay awake for him! I was embarrassed at my weakness.

About that time, Judas came—along with some elders and soldiers. When they tried to take Jesus, I saw a chance to redeem myself. “You’ll not get MY master...” Out with my sword and I guess I was rusty—all I killed was an ear—and wouldn’t you know, Jesus healed that. I wanted to fight, but he stopped me.

I was pushed aside as they grabbed him and dragged him along. I wanted to help, so I followed—except I didn’t know what to do. As they tried him, I stood to the side, watching.

I never imagined that someone would recognize me—but a servant girl said, “Hey, here is one of them—he was with Jesus...”

“Not me, NO! I don’t even know that man!” I said.

As they spit on him and as they beat him and as they falsely accused him, I stood silent, doing nothing. Some bodyguard I was!

Two more times, someone recognized me and I denied knowing him. The last time, I cursed and swore and as I turned—I saw him looking at me. I bolted right then. I took off and went to the mount and I ran to his place of prayer and I cried and I prayed and I asked God to make me stronger and I asked God to DO SOMETHING. I wished that I had been man enough to die with him. Yet I stay and hid. A weaker man you’ll never find.

It was the women who were strong. They and John. They followed the who thing. They were even there as the Romans nailed him to the cross. Even little ol’ John was braver than me! They watched him die and I wasn’t even man enough to do that—and I had promised to save him or die trying.

A couple of mornings later, feeling lower than I had ever felt, I was talking to John about a lot of things, including building a new boat and making a living. The women were gone to take care of his body, but the came back in a rush—chattering about his body being missing. “He’s gone!” they said.

John and I ran to see that they were talking about. Being younger, John outran me—but as he slowed at the opening, I passed him.

There was NOTHING inside. Well, there was something. The spices they had dropped and the burial cloths were there—but he was gone! Suddenly, his teachings came back to us and it was like scales fell from our spiritual eyes. I KNEW that he was alive! Just like he had raised Lazarus, he had raised himself somehow.

But we didn’t know where he was. AND I had let him down—I wasn’t sure I could face him after being such a failure—failure time and again.

Where was he?

Mary soon had the answer. She saw him near the tomb, but then he was gone. We were excited, all of us, but I kept wondering if he would still have me after what I had done. Would he still love me? He appeared to all of us two times—but he ever spoke to me personally and I didn’t know what he was thinking.

Finally, tired and emotionally worn out, I decided that I needed to go fishing. The others went with me.

We didn't catch anything, but I was feeling a bit better as we headed for shore the next morning. I was back in my element. On the shore we saw a man who called out to us, "cast the net on the right side..."

We did it without really thinking, and came up with a net full of fish. Suddenly, John knew who it was, "It's the Master!" he shouted. We were headed for shore, but I couldn't wait and dove into the water and swam to him.

After he had fed us, he looked at me and asked if I loved him. "Of course I do, Master"

"Feed my sheep"

Again, he asked, "Peter, do you love me?" "Certainly I do"

"Feed my lambs"

Then he asked again and I understood that he was giving me a job to do—that I was to tell his story and strengthen the others as we spread the Good News of his love and the news of his resurrection.

After all my failures, he was forgiving me and asking me to do his work. He still loved me! He was showing his confidence in the fact that I would some day live up to my name.

Finally, I was ready to live for him and to die for him—but not by my own strength or power, but by his.

[At this point I pulled off headgear and read this poem—it can be found on the internet]

"Judas, Peter" by Lucy Shaw