

“I Know What I Saw!”

I guess it all started for me that day my mother-in-law was sick with a really high fever. Apparently some itinerant preacher happened by and, I don't know, prayed over her. And the fever left her just like that. I wasn't there at the time, and I know it sounds crazy, but when I got there, sure enough, she was better. I know what I saw.

I figured that was the last of him; itinerant preachers tend not to hang around very long in Capernaum. But one day James and John, Andrew and I had just gotten back from fishing all night. We hadn't caught even one little fish. But this stranger just appeared and got into my boat. He told me to put out a little so he could teach the small crowd that had gathered. I figured he probably was the one who had healed mom, and so it was the least I could do. After a while he told me to put out even deeper and to let down the nets. I think I said something like, “Yeah, whatever!” But I did, and all of a sudden we had so many fish in the nets that they were about to break. James and John came over in their boat, and we filled up both boats with so many fish I thought we were all going to sink. Let me tell you, I was scared. Not about sinking; that's happened before. I was scared of that man. It's like he was some kind of heavenly angel. I fell to my face and said to him, “Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!” You know what he said to me? (I'll never forget it.) He said, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” What a curious thing to say! He began to walk further along the shore, and the guys and I just left our nets, and our fish, and followed him. Something about him made us want to be with him. And we were, from that point on. You might think I'm crazy. But I know what I saw.

By that time there were a pretty good number of disciples; I mean, word had spread. And one day he just counted out twelve of us, and said he was making us his apostles. His specially “sent” ones. I couldn't believe he chose me! He even gave me a new name, the name Peter, which means “rock.” I thought, Lord, you've got the wrong guy. But he never wavered. Not even when . . . well, I'll get to that.

One day he came up to me and said, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” “Teacher, speak!” I said. “A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty, and the man canceled both of their debts. So what do you think, which of the two will love him more?” And I said, “the one with the greater debt.” “Exactly,” he said. Then he pointed out a woman nearby, you know, one of those sordid, disreputable ones, if you know what I mean. He said, “she has not stopped kissing my feet and anointing them with oil. Do you know why? Because I told her that her sins were forgiven. Simon, you have never anointed my feet. Yet your sins have been forgiven as well.” I was so ashamed. And I couldn't help but wonder, who is this man, that has even the authority to forgive sins? I know what I saw.

One night he told us to get into a boat and take it across the sea to the other side. And this big storm came up, and I thought we were done for. But one of the boys started screaming and pointing, and I looked, and there was Jesus, walking on top of the water towards us. Something came over me and I said, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” And, I did. I started walking toward him. On the water. My eyes were on him the whole time. But then I saw the big waves, and kinda freaked out, and I started to sink. He reached out his hand to me, and lifted me back up, and said to me, “You of little

faith, why did you doubt?" And do you know what? As soon as he stepped into the boat, the storm stopped. That's when I knew that he was truly the Messiah, the Son of God. I know what I saw!

I have a lot more incredible stories I could talk about. And wish I could tell you all the amazing things he said and taught. They were and are truly the words of life.

But then came that dark, awful night. We had gathered together for a meal. I was sitting right next to him (my favorite place to be), and he turned to me and said, in front of everyone, "Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me." I was hurt and not a little offended. "No way, Lord, I will never deny you." I was just . . . so sure, so convicted.

But then we went out into the garden, and all of a sudden, a crowd of thugs showed up to arrest him. I had with me a small sword, and I didn't know what else to do, so I pulled it out and lashed out at one of them. Ended up he was just someone's slave. And I . . . I cut his ear off. Jesus cried out and said, "No more of this!" And then he healed the slave's ear right on the spot. I was so ashamed. Because I know what I saw.

The thugs bound Jesus and took him away. The rest of us followed, but only at a distance. We were all afraid that they were going to arrest us. Some servant girl in the crowd accused me of being one of his disciples. And I . . . I . . . denied it. "Woman, I do not know him." Two more times this happened. And then the cock crowed. And I began to weep. I had failed him. I had betrayed him.

The thugs took him first to the council, which includes both the chief priests and scribes. And from there they took him to Pilate, the Roman governor. They accused him of blasphemy. They demanded he be crucified. And Pilate agreed.

How could they?! He was the Son of God! I know what I saw!

On the first day of the week, the eleven of us gathered together (eleven rather than twelve now, since Judas was no longer with us). And then some of the women came. The two Mary's, and Joanna, and a few others. They were crazy with excitement, all talking at the same time. We could hardly get them to calm down. They said they had been at Jesus' tomb. And that two men in dazzling clothes had appeared out of nowhere, and said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."

The women had believed them. We wanted to. But we couldn't. Not yet. Someone doesn't just rise from the dead; I don't care who they are, the world just doesn't work that way. But something made me suddenly get up without a word, and run to the tomb. When I got there the stone covering the tomb had been rolled away. I stooped down to look inside. And the I saw . . . the linen cloths that he had been buried in. They were cast aside, by themselves. As if they were no longer needed.

I know what I saw; no one can tell me otherwise. Suddenly it all made sense, everything. And I believed.

After that, you don't hear anything more about me in Luke's gospel—the other gospels, yes, but not in Luke. But that's okay. Trust me, I was there. I heard all the stories of his appearing. Like the one of how he had appeared to two travelers on the road to Emmaus. More importantly, I was there when he came to all of us, and stood among us. "Peace be with you," he said. It was his voice, his words! Just like that night he calmed the storm. "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, see that it is myself." I'm telling you, those hands and feet had been pierced by nails! I know what I saw.

And then he just started opening our minds, to all of scripture, to how everything in the law and the prophets and the psalms had been fulfilled. And then he said to us: “You are witnesses of these things. Go out and proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in my name to all nations. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Power from on high—he wasn’t kidding! That’s another story, for another time. Another unbelievable story. But here again, I know what I saw.

Years later, I have finally started writing some of these things down. I’d like to read for you just a few lines from a letter I wrote, to all those who had been scattered after Jesus’ crucifixion. I’m humbled and honored that these words are now part of your New Testament. In a little section called “First Peter.”

“Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you² to tend the flock of God that is in your charge . . .³ Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd appears, you will win the crown of glory that never fades away . . . All of you must clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another, for “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” [Trust me—I know!] Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.”

Oh yes. He cares for you. He loves you. He gave his life for you. I know what I saw!