

Two Long Nights

Peter fled. An olive branch slapped his face. Oblivious to the sting, he plunged into the black night. Driven by pent up anger he circled back towards Jerusalem. Now he knew what to do.

He berated himself for abandoning Jesus. True, he had stayed close by in the garden. But he had dozed off. The talk over supper had been long and intense. Peter hadn't understood it all. Then his leader had stayed so long with his thoughts and prayers at the rock. In the quiet of the night, Peter's eyes had grown heavy, his limbs had relaxed and he had slept.

Jolted into consciousness by the noisy crowd, confused by the rabble, the flares, Judas' revolting kiss, and Jesus' arrest, he had instinctively drawn his sword and swiped at the attackers.

Oh yes! He was fully awake now. "I'll stand by him!" he told himself through clenched teeth.

Peter remembered another attempted arrest. Jesus had slipped through a crowd of angry antagonists, unharmed, untouched, his enemies powerless to complete their task. "I will stand by him!" he repeated to himself. "I will watch and witness another miraculous outcome!"

These were Peter's thoughts as he followed the bobbing, flickering flares of torchlight until they disappeared into the courtyard of Caiaphas' mansion. He lingered outside, his sweat drying on his skin. Chilled in the cold night air, he saw the glow of a brazier in the courtyard; a friend came to the gate and took Peter inside. Jesus was out of sight inside the house. Peter winced as a loud shout and laughter came to his ears.

"You're not one of the followers of that Nazarene, are you?" asked a slave girl.

Indignantly, he replied, "I am not!"

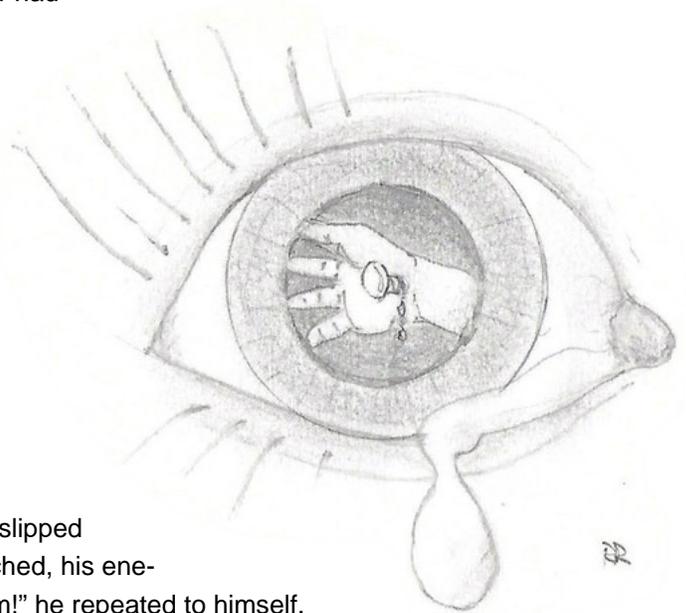
Straining to hear anything from the house, he walked around the courtyard and returned to the fire.

Someone remarked, "I'm sure this fellow was with him. He even has a Galilean accent."

"I don't even know him!" snapped Peter.

Another hour passed. A man approached him and said, "I'm sure I saw you out in the olive grove. You were with that group when this Nazarene was arrested."

Peter's temper exploded. He swore.



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“Man!” he hissed, “I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

As the first light of dawn greyed the darkness, a raucous “Kirkirrrrrrrr!” pierced Peter’s consciousness and he remembered what Jesus had said: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.”

Again Peter fled. He dashed out of the gate before wrenching sobs overwhelmed him. Among the trees he spilled his agony, drained of any hope for the future.

A few days later, seven men blew on chilled fingers. Water lapped lazily against the gunwales. Despondent in the darkness, Peter mumbled, “All night and not one fish!”

“Let’s lower the net one last time,” sighed Nathanael. “We might catch a few to take to our families for breakfast.”

“There’s nothing,” said Thomas. Their net and hopes sank into the depths of Lake Galilee.

Grey dawn revealed long faces as the fishermen prepared to quit for the night.

Suddenly they heard, “Ho there!” All eyes focused on a figure on the beach who called, “Did you catch any fish, Friends?”

“Nothing!” the fishermen called back.

The man on the beach yelled, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”

“No harm in trying,” said James. “On the right side, he said. Let’s do it!”

A little later Peter said, “I think we have fish. Can you feel the pull on the boat?”

They hauled the edge of the net into the boat. Silvery scales glinted in the low rays of morning sunlight; some fish leapt to freedom, but many slithered to their feet in the boat.

Peter’s friend nudged Peter and pointed to the man on the shore. “It’s the Lord,” he said quietly. Peter stared, astonished, grabbed his cloak and jumped into the shallows, splashing his way excitedly towards Jesus, while the other fishermen rowed ashore, towing the overflowing net.

Peter, wet clothes clinging to his legs, slowed and shyly approached Jesus who was cooking fish over an open fire.

“Bring some of the fish you have just caught,” he said.

Quietly Peter obeyed. He dragged the net ashore and counted the fish. One hundred and fifty three.

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Jesus invited them all to eat breakfast. With eager smiles they sat down and enjoyed the warm bread, roasted fish, and the friendship of their most trusted companion. Peter, however, was subdued. He held back, the pain of his denials freshly revived.

“Come!” said Jesus to Peter after breakfast. “Come with me.”

“Do you love me?” Jesus asked. Peter felt jabbed in his gut as he remembered declaring he was not one of Jesus followers. His gaze lowered, he replied, “Yes, Lord, You know that I love you.”

“Do you truly love me?” asked Jesus.

Peter, in torment, remembered saying he didn’t even know Jesus. “Yes, Lord. You know that I love you,” he said huskily.

Gently, Jesus placed a finger under Peter’s chin so their eyes could meet. “Do you love me?” he asked.

Tears stung Peter’s eyes. Angry for denying Jesus, he loudly proclaimed, “Lord! You know all things! You know that I love you!”

As Jesus walked with Peter along the beach in the morning sunlight, and talked with him, Peter discovered forgiveness. His crushing guilt lifted and freed him from oppression, depression and hopelessness. He found a love that transcended his weakness.

Andrea Kidd

Based on the following passages of Scripture:

Matthew 26:34, 36-58, 69-75

Mark 14:30-54, 66-72

Luke 22:34, 39-62

John 13:38, 18:1-18, 25-27