

## John. Easter Sunday, 2021.

I had never thought of myself as the type of man who would cry - though it did happen once. But then, I saw the Boss cry too - twice, actually. Once was the time we went to see his friends Mary and Martha a few days after their brother Lazarus had died.

That was an amazing experience! I've never seen anything like it! We had been on the far side of the Jordan river where his cousin, John, had baptized people in the river and even Jesus himself. So it had a special meaning for him.

Some messengers came from Bethany and told him that Lazarus, Martha and Mary's brother, was very sick, and they were asking for him.

For some reason which I didn't understand at the time, the Boss decided that there was no urgency, so we stayed by the river for a couple more days to get some rest.

Then he said we'd better get going, but by the time we'd travelled a day to get to Bethany, we arrived to find that Lazarus had died a few days earlier, and had been buried in his tomb for four days now and there was quite a crowd of mourners there, comforting the sisters in their grief.

Much as he tried to, the Boss couldn't comfort them and it really affected him because his eyes welled up and silent tears rolled down his face. Then he took charge and told some men there to move the stone away that was

covering the tomb entrance. I can't say we were too thrilled by this prospect as the stench was likely to be horrendous! But they did what he said, and surprisingly, there was no smell at all. Then the Boss calls to Lazarus to come out - as if he could hear him! But that's just what happened! We were all absolutely speechless. I had no words, I just sank to my knees in wonder.

The other time I saw the Boss cry was a different matter altogether.

We had just come into Jerusalem with an amazing crowd chanting and singing along the road, throwing palm branches in front of the donkey that Jesus was riding. There was a tremendous noise with all the people shouting

and singing - so much so that a bunch of Pharisees (pompous lot) told Jesus to hush everyone up. He turned around on them and said that even if the people were quiet, the stones would start singing! They didn't know how to answer that.

But that joyous moment was stopped almost abruptly as Jesus became clearly very upset and began howling openly and saying that the city should have known what would bring it peace, but that even now it was hidden from its eyes. He prophesied that it would be destroyed because it didn't recognize the coming of God. He said these things that I didn't really understand, and because they

were so bizarre I found them easy to remember.

But it wasn't really Jesus' tears I was going to tell you about, but my own.

I've always regarded myself as a pretty tough guy - fishing is a hard trade, and you have to be out in all weathers and at all times of the day and night, so you toughen up or go under - as they say.

But when Jesus arrived in our lives and called me and my brother James from our boats when we were mending our nets that day with our father, my whole world kind of flipped and I knew I just had to follow this man.

I think I loved him instinctively from the first - I don't know why, I just felt I could trust him completely and utterly, for anything and everything. Even our father didn't object when we left him in the boat on his own and set out to follow this man. That was strange in itself too.

But the time I want to tell you about was much later - about three years later.

We were sharing a Passover supper - all the twelve of us close followers of Jesus - and I was sitting next to him. I always did when I could, and he always seemed happy with that, like we had a special kind of bond that needed no words.

It was a different kind of supper, and when he had given thanks for our bread and wine he gave us pieces of the bread and told us to eat it as it was his 'body'. He then gave us his cup of wine to pass around, telling us all to take a sip because that was his 'blood'.

That made us all uneasy and a hush came over the table. I heard a sound, and turned just in time to see Judas going out the back and down the stairs to the street. I had no idea what for until later.

It was a warm evening, so we all took a stroll into the garden at the base of the mount of Olives; it's called Gethsemane, and on that evening it was heady with the scent of thyme, rosemary and the olive trees. We were all

sleepy after a good meal and wine, but Jesus asked us to keep awake and pray. He didn't specify what for, and I have to confess that not one of us managed to stay awake. The Boss came over to us a couple of times to prod us and tell us to be vigilant while he went off by himself to pray, but we were really dopey and dozed off again.

We were woken by a detachment of the Temple guard; Judas was with them. He came up to Jesus and gave him a hug and then the soldiers tried to grab him. Peter had a sword and lashed out, slicing the ear off one of the guards, but Jesus stopped all of us in our

tracks by saying, 'Enough, who are you looking for?'

They said, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Jesus said, 'I am he,' and the way he said those words was so powerful that some of the guards literally fell backwards. Even I found it scary, and I'd known him for the previous three years!

He told the guards to let the rest of us go, but even so, one of them made a grab at me and I was only wearing an undergarment as it was so warm. The guard caught hold of it but I wriggled free and ran, stark naked, into the grove to hide amongst the trees. They didn't follow me.

It wasn't until a while later that I remembered that the Boss had said we would all run away

when he needed us most. I don't know about the others because we had all bomb-burst away to avoid the guards, but I felt pretty shitty about that.

In the morning, having crept back to the town and got some clothes on, I heard a commotion in the square outside Governor Pilate's palace.

I went along and there was the Boss!

He looked awful - he could barely stand, he had been beaten brutally and had been stripped of most of his ordinary clothes and they had put a purple robe on him and crushed a sort of crown onto his head, but it was made of thorns. I think it was from the jujube tree, which is particularly nasty as it has paired

thorns, one straight and the other curved, so any movement of his head must have dug the thorns in even more.

Blood was seeping through the purple cloth and running down his face; he was breathing fast and it took a centurion to hold him up while Pilate asked the crowd if they wanted him to release Jesus or a well-known murderer, Barabbas. I think the Sanhedrin must have paid some people in the crowd because they all bayed for Barabbas to be released and not Jesus.

I had caught up with Peter in the crowd, and he had filled me in on what had occurred overnight. It seems the Sanhedrin had been

busy and woken Pilate to get a death sentence for Jesus.

Peter looked very down in the mouth too, so I asked him why. He looked at me long and hard, and then his lower lip began to tremble; "I betrayed him", he said. We both looked at each other for what felt like the longest moments and then we just clung together as we heard the crowd yelling 'Crucify him!' Over and over again. Pilate couldn't silence them, so he asked for a bowl of water, which was odd, but then when the crowd had quieted to see what he was going to do, he just washed his hands and said to the crowd, 'I am innocent of this man's blood. It is your responsibility.'

What a cop-out! He was clearly scared of a riot if he didn't pacify the crowd.

The rest of that day was the worst of my life.

We watched in horror as the Boss was punched, kicked and almost dragged up the hill behind the city to a place called Golgotha (Skull Hill) where two thieves were already on crosses. He couldn't make it with that heavy beam across his shoulders, which had been ripped raw from the flagella the Romans had flogged him with. After it was clear even to those stupid Romans that he wasn't going to be able to get up the hill on his own, they

pulled a big African guy from the crowd and told him to help.

I had never seen a crucifixion up close before, and I never want to again. I'm not going to tell you about it - you don't want to know.

All I will say is that I remember the thud as the upright post fell into the hole that had been dug. It must have been at least 2 feet deep, and I could hear a ripping sound from Jesus' arms and legs as suddenly all his weight hung on three nails.

The Boss's mum was beside me, and when that happened, she turned into me, sobbing uncontrollably. All I could do was hold her, and

slowly I raised my eyes up. Jesus was still focussing - though God knows how - and he was looking straight at me.

"John," he said, "this is your mother now, and you are her son."

Hearing his voice, his mother turned around and looked up too. She couldn't bring herself to speak, just bit her lip and nodded, and then turned her face back into my chest.

Not long after, the Boss gave a big cry and it sounded like, "It is finished!" And then I heard a rattle in his chest and throat, and he suddenly went limp and sagged forward on the cross - and never moved again.

A massive electrical storm came up from nowhere over the city, and the sky went dark as midnight, lightning and thunder flashing and crashing all around us. I saw one of the centurions, who had wielded a mallet only a couple of hours previously, slowly bend his knees and look up at the Boss. He muttered something, but I didn't catch it in the noise.

Three days later, the strangest thing happened; Mary Magdalene had gone to the Boss's tomb to grieve, and found the big stone rolled away from the mouth of the cave. That was really odd because the Sanhedrin had placed a guard on the tomb to stop anyone interfering with it and starting rumours.



Mary said she thought the tomb was empty, so Peter and I ran as fast as we could to see. Peter was older and slower than I was, so I got there first, but I was kind of scared to go inside. When Peter got there, he went straight in, and he hadn't been in there more than a moment when he called out, "Come and look at this!"

I went in and looked; there were the Boss's grave clothes - but where was his body! I felt vaguely crazy but I had the greatest sense of bizarre happiness, which was totally inexplicable, but once again, my world had turned instantly upside down - from despair to exultation.

Ask me why - I couldn't tell you - but it was then that I cried - for sheer joy.