



SIEBENQUELL

Reflection on John 21, 1-14

The Yawning Emptiness

Part 2



SOURCE: R. MONNERJAHN 2010

I knew the silence of the Old Man. It was always the womb of the word. After a time, I was convinced that the story was over for the time being and wanted to sit up and accompany my teacher home. But his soft, gentle hand pressed by back to his breast.

»Slowly, slowly, my young friend. Neither the telling nor the learning comes so swiftly. We needed to earn this on that night as well.« Then he continued with his story. Till this day I do not know whether it was the strength of his arm or the indescribable tenderness of his tale that held me fast.

»Before we had even reached the shore he spoke to us. 'My children, you have nothing to eat?' It was a question and a statement at one and the same time. The Master posed his question to us very gently and very lovingly. In his voice lay this deep understanding for the whole sadness and frustration of our situation. When I look back, I often think too myself, that I should have recognized him. He was always the one who understood the yawning emptiness, better than we did.

He knew the story of our night, for it is the story of all nights. He understood the flight into darkness and the destiny of all people who have become the prisoners of the surface of life. He knew his way around the human experience of strenuous labours that lead to nothing. He knew of the hunger that drives us to do this and the hunger that lingers on afterwards.«

I closed my eyes tightly in order to set a dam forged of eyelids against my tears. It was as if my great teacher had drawn his tale out of my heart. For it was exactly this which was hollowing me out and leaving me empty and bereft: this hunger for security, a future and a consolation, a hunger I could not work or shake off. This hunger for more time and space with my teacher, master and friend that I could not bury with labours or learning. No wonder that his Master, and the Master of us all, so loved him, for he, too, had understood how we children had arrived at the hour of the empty nets.

As if he could read my heart, he said to me, »Until we came to the hour of the empty nets, we did not truly understand that hunger is not our enemy. The signs were long there. At that time in Samaria, at the well, he saved a woman from her yawning emptiness by means of her thirst. During that night, we were like that woman, convinced then, as you are today, that the thirst for more life, meaning and value was our enemy. Therefore, we wanted to fight, vanquish and suppress it. That is what we do with our enemies. Oh yes, there were signs aplenty. Thirst is not our enemy. On the last day of the feast of booths he already said that thirst would draw us to him. He always placed it within our hearts: Follow the path of your hunger, your thirst, for they will draw you to the heart of God.«

»What happened then? What did he do with your emptiness?« Secretly I wished, that the Old Man would now tell a story of a miracle, a magical multiplication. For this story was certainly giving me insight, but no relief.

»He bade us to cast the nets out on the other side of the boat.«

Disappointed by this mundane suggestion I mumbled, »And what was that supposed to accomplish?«

The Old Man sighed. »You remind me of Simon Peter. He was a hardheaded as you are. But, what he said unto us, we did, that made all the difference. We did not negotiate about the degree of difficulty or chatter on about past labours. Those who do so never come to fish, never come to life, never come to the light. You see, fisher folk are creatures of habit. They always cast the net on the same side of the boat, so that they might draw it back in with the strong and practiced arm. We always practice what we already know. The other side of the boat is the undiscovered country of the heart, the place we do not know, the path we do not take. Here we learned how we should deal with our yawning emptiness.«

I remained hardnosed and unimpressed. »Master, what great lesson was there to learn? Even more effort after useless toil?«

Perhaps it was his sighing, perhaps the breathe of the wind, but I heard a quiet whispering breeze and knew that the words now coming into the world would carry. God within them. »Cast the net on the other side of your boat, young man. Be a servant of your life. It is always those who tackle life and risk it who know from whence the fullness of life comes. It was not emptiness, but water that he turned into wine. The water bearers knew from where the wine had come. Not emptiness, but nets were filled by him. And we, the net casters, knew from where the fullness of fish had come. You need to put into play what you have at your disposal.«

Then the weariness ebbed from his voice and a grin flashed across his old, beautiful face. »If you had been there, then you would understand. 153 fish! We could not even draw the nets into the boat, but had to pull them behind us onto land. If you want to walk the path with him, then you need to learn that for him the yawning emptiness taunts his father. He never could stand emptiness, be it in wineglasses, stomachs, hearts or nets. They always were a taunt toward the fullness that is the

desire of his father's heart. Like father, like son. 600 liters of wine, 12 baskets of bread leftovers out of 5 loaves. 153 fish. Countless rooms. That is what we find in the house of his father.«

Then the Old Man bent low and his lips, weathered by sun and wind, whispered into my ear: »I place a word into your heart. Draw. Water must be drawn from the well and love from the heart, meaning from our hungers, fish from the depths and life from the yawning emptiness. And none of us would have recognised him as teacher, master and friend, if the father had not drawn us to him through our hunger and thirst.«

Then my tears broke through. They were to me like a spring that gushes with living waters. I wept and sobbed liked a child, unprotected and heedlessly. For every sadness, fear, insecurity and doubt in me, a tear sprang forth. They trickled down my cheeks and splashed individually onto the hand of teacher and then ran down into the fine sand of the shore. Thus, next to the sweet water of the sea my heart could express itself in salt water. And while they ceaselessly ran, I was deeply shaken that so many tears, so much yearning, was hidden deep within my soul. They came from depths I did not suspect within myself.

The multiplication of life was drawn from me. I wanted to be hardened and protect myself from the coming pain and disappointments of life. But despite it all, I could not prevent dreams being drawn from my innermost being. I could not hinder yearning from jumping into the boat of my life nor tears from springing to my eyes, even though I did not even know for whom I wept them.

Beneath the surface a liveliness was seething within me. And when this fullness came to the surface anyway, I could clear say what my teacher, master and friend said on the shore long ago and passed on to me on this shore, 'It is The Lord!'

While I wept, the Old Man bend forward and wrote with his finger on the ground. A great many little lines in the sand.

»What are you doing, Master?«

»I am counting your tears.«

As he finished and sank back into the depths of his silence, I counted the little lines in the sand.

There were 153.

(to be continued)

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