



SIEBENQUELL

Reflection on John 21, 1-14

The Yawning Emptiness

Part 3



SOURCE: R. MONNERJAHN 2010

»Master, are you not cold? Perhaps we should go home, before you become ill. Or I could light a fire for us.«

The Old Man smiled wearily and shook his head. »I need no fire. I am not cold. Besides, no fire that you could ignite would ever warm me like the charcoal fire of the shore. It warms me still.«

And that, beloved listener, was already enough to lure the next story from him.

»Have I ever told you how I once threw Peter, that old hard head, out of the boat?« A mischievous grin flitted across his face. I shook my head, for, in fact, I could not imagine how my old teacher, master und friend could have thrown the Rock into the water. After all, the Old Man was a son of the land and Peter was an experienced sojourner of the waves.

»Oh yes«, said the Old Man, with no small portion of pleasure in his voice. »What my physical strength could never achieve, my words were able to do. Hardly had I said, »It is he Lord!« to him, and already my words had bowled him over. Immediately he covered his nakedness and jumped into the water.«

»But why?«, I asked aghast.

»Those are the exercises of the heart for humans, as old as creation. Those are the two movements that we humans constantly practice since Eden. When we are ashamed of the yawning emptiness, then we cover ourselves up and hide. Did not the Teller of the Genesis tale say: 'Then God called out to the earthling and asked him. He answered: I heard the noise of you in the garden and was afraid, for I have nothing on and I hid myself.'? (Gen 3, 9-10)

That is an old pattern for us. We trust only the fruit of our labours, but not the fullness that is drawn out of us. We do not trust our feelings, dreams, visions and our yearning, but our thoughts, plans and considerations.«

At first I remained silent, for I recognised myself in the words of my teacher. But my curiosity was ever stronger than my reticence. »But master, to throw oneself into the sea strikes me almost as an image of self-destruction. It says: All is lost and there is no hope.«

»You are right, my young friend. For not just fish, but humans as well, must be drawn out of the yawning emptiness. That is how it was for Peter, who needed to be drawn from the depths just as the fish were. We were always so different; I, a man of the word, he, a man of action and of instinct. It was his way of telling the Lord, that his life was to be judged like the Sea of Tiberias: Lord, there is nothing left to draw out of me. That is the irony of the yawning emptiness. On the one hand, we suffer at the hands of the emptiness that never seems to end, and on the other hand, it fills us with self-contempt and self-reproach, memories of past weakness, brokenness and betrayal. We need a God who can draw us out of this overflowing emptiness.«

»I can understand him, Master. I, too, feel the urge to disguise and hide myself when I think of my coming encounter with the Nazarean. I often have the feeling, that I cannot stand before his gaze.«

The gentleness of his heart filled the eyes of the Old Man. »I myself am responsible for your fears. I have likely told too little of his kindness. Peter leapt into the water, because the charcoal fire of the shore reminded him of the charcoal fire of his denial. And Jesus drew him out of the sea to a charcoal fire at which, not reproach, reprimand and distrust were served, but where bread and fish waited for us. Never forget this!«

He grabbed me by the shoulders, turned his blind, far-seeing eyes on me and repeated: »Never forget this! For this is sin. Sin is the woundedness that holds you fast and paralysed in a hungry and anxious place. And then poison flows out of you that will destroy others. For Peter sin was the charcoal fire, because the charcoal fire was the place of his weakness, his inability, his woundedness. If Jesus had not drawn him out of this hungry and anxious place, then the poison in him would have destroyed the undreamed of depths of love that were in him.«

Almost in panic I pleaded with the Old Man: »How, Master? How does he draw us out of the yawning emptiness? Tell me, please, tell me. For I know this cold, bloodless place that holds me fast. I fear it greatly, for I often believe, that I will never again emerge from it.«

The Old Man continued to tell his story. »Three times Jesus threw the net of a question out: Do you love me? And three times he drew from the depths of my old friend more life than the surface of his threefold betrayal showed. Yes, Jesus followed his own advice to us. If on the one side of the boat of a life the net only catches betrayal, then Jesus tosses the net out on the other side of this life. And behold: indescribable fullness. In my tale, Peter is not the fisher of mortals, but one of the fish, drawn in by the love of God. Perhaps it is true of him, as it is true of us, that we can only truly lead, accompany and catch people after we have been drawn out of our See of Tiberias.«

Then I ask the Master, how the story continued. And he spoke of many steps. When I think back on this day, then he actually infused into my heart the willingness to risk the next step. For Peter also had to draw the net onto dry land, to the place, where we live our lives. On the sea and in the boat, we will not fashion our lives. That was also my next step, for what the master drew out of me on also had to be drawn onto dry land. It had to be taken to the place where I live, work, struggle, love and suffer. It had to be taken to the place, where I fashion life.

I often return to this story. My beloved teacher and master went to the house of the Father many years ago. After his death, I added this story to his great work. It is calming, a gift he gave to us.

For since then the yawning emptiness has often returned. Again and again the great fear surfaces, that there is nothing left that can be drawn from our depths. Behind this fear lies the second greatest fear, namely, that we cannot hold on to what we drawn out. We are afraid, that this life will slip through our fingers. Here, the Old Man speaks comfort to us. The net will not tear.

We buried the Old Man on this shore. After wild storms and heavy floodwaters, no one can precisely say where we have laid him. No stone, no sign shows us the way. However, in windless moments, you can smell fresh bread and roasting fish and the unmistakable, penetrating aroma of a charcoal fire.

In the darkest nights of your highly personal experience of the yawning emptiness, I wish us all a shore, a teacher, friend and master, and a nose filled with the aroma of fresh bread and roasting fish.

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