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By John Steven Paul and Soul Purpose,
The liturgical drama troupe of Valparaiso University

Characters:

SIMON PETER¹
THOMAS called the Twin
NATHANAEL of Cana in Galilee
JAMES ZEBEDEE
JOHN ZEBEDEE
THE BELOVED²
JESUS
NARRATOR

PART I: Thinking

(SIMON is onstage for the reading, seated, pensive. SIMON wears blue jeans [or khakis], sandals [or no shoes], a dark colored shirt, and a long vest. He also has a long sash that ties and serves as a belt, but it is lying unused at his side. When the reading finishes, the other DISCIPLES come one by one to join him. They are similarly dressed, belts tied.)

NARRATOR:

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way.

JOHN:

Hey.

SIMON:

Hey.

¹ SIMON is all-enthusiasm, but nothing seems to be working out for him.

² The BELOVED has a track record of being exactly that – the BELOVED. He doesn't have to be perfect; everyone just LIKES him and things work out for him. It's kind of sickening, if you let it get to you.

JOHN:

What are you doing?

SIMON:

I'm... thinking.

THOMAS:

About what?

SIMON:

Do you ever feel like everything's about to change?

JAMES:

Most days, now.

SIMON:

That's how I feel. Like everything's about to change.

BELOVED:

Why?

SIMON:

Well, we've all spent the last several years as disciples... learning (vague gesture). Taking in... Haven't we? I just feel like all that's about to change.

JOHN:

Me too.

BELOVED:

Are you sure it has to?

JAMES:

Pretty sure.

THOMAS:

How can you be sure?

JAMES:

Because... He is risen.

NATHAN'L:

He *is* risen. Indeed.

SIMON:

And we're just *left behind*.

JOHN:

Good title!

SIMON:

Huh?

JOHN:

Never mind.

BELOVED:

I still say, not everything will change. We're still the Twelve—

THOMAS:

Eleven.

NATHAN'L:

Well.

JOHN:

And we're not the disciples anymore. Now that *He* is risen, *we're* the sent. We're *apostles*.

BELOVED:

Playing with words.

SIMON:

That's another thing I've been thinking about, what could that possibly mean?³

(All turn contemplative.)

THOMAS:

Where will you go, John?

JOHN:

Me – I don't know. I guess... I suppose I'll follow James. Wouldn't want to break up the team?
Where will we go, James?

JAMES:

God knows... At least, I hope He does. Nathanael?

NATHAN'L:

I know you know better than to be looking at me right now.

THOMAS:

None of you have plans?

JAMES:

Do you, Thomas?

THOMAS:

(Shrugs. Then, to the BELOVED) And you?

BELOVED:

I'm staying here.

Pause.

³ *I also picture some antagonism between SIMON and the BELOVED.*

SIMON:

Well, I'm going fishing. *(He gets up and ties on his belt.)*

BELOVED:

Fishing?

OTHERS:

Wait a minute! We'll go with you.

SIMON:

Copy cats! Come up with your own ideas for a change.

BELOVED:

Fishing?

SIMON:

That's right. Fishing!

NATHAN'L:

You've got to have someone to help row.

JAMES:

And pull in the nets.

JOHN:

And dump the fish into the boat.

NATHAN'L:

Don't you?

SIMON:

(Giving in to them, but in good humor now.) Follow me then.

BELOVED:

Maybe we should wait here and see if Jesus comes back to tell us what to do?

SIMON:

Believe me, no one would love that more than me. But the Lord appears to be taking His time getting in touch with us, so... I'm going fishing. Thomas, you in?

THOMAS:

(He's been hanging back.) Here I am.

Part II: Fishing

The DISCIPLES, including the BELOVED, all get on the boat.

- 1. The DISCIPLES fish.*
- 2. They catch nothing. (This is stressful for SIMON.)*
- 3. Peter removes his belt and his outer vest. (There may be cat-calls from the other DISCIPLES, to which he responds by rolling his eyes.)*

The scene begins very much like the boat scene in *A Fish Story*, but this time, the disciples actually fish. They cast the nets three times, pulling them back in to see that they haven't caught a single fish.

JESUS is standing on the shore as far as possible from the DISCIPLES and their boat

JESUS:

(calling from the shore) Children, you have no fish have you?

JAMES:

(after waiting a moment for SIMON to answer) No.

JESUS:

(calls again) Cast the net to the right side of the boat and you will find some.

JAMES:

I feel like we've been here before.

JOHN:

There's something different now.

BELOVED:

Jesus was in the boat with us.

THOMAS:

And I wasn't.

JAMES:

What do you say, Simon?

Again, they look to SIMON for leadership. He approves the activity with an appropriately sarcastic gesture, at which point they haul in the wet nets, cast them over the other side of the boat, and find them suddenly very heavy.

THOMAS:

What in the world - !?!

OTHERS:

Hold it tight! (*etc, etc, ad lib*)⁴

NATHAN'L:

A minute ago there was nothing, and now –

⁴ Get hold of it
Grab the corner
I can't hold on
It's too slippery
My thumb is caught
Wait
Now I've got it
Good! Now hold on
Let it go
Watch out
There it goes
Down and down
Deeper and deeper

THOMAS:

It's a miracle.

BELOVED:

(to SIMON) It's the Lord!

SIMON is briefly in shock, then throws on his vest, ties his belt, and leaps from the boat.

JOHN:

Where's he going?!

BELOVED:

He's off, swimming to shore – and shouldn't you and I be doing the same??

BELOVED moves as if to follow SIMON off the boat. James catches him by the belt.

JAMES: Wait! If you go too, then there's no way we'll ever get this net and these fish to dry land. Come on, now, we need you *here*.

THOMAS: Besides, we'll probably beat him there.

Other DISCIPLES laugh, and all continue to struggle with the net. The BELOVED joins in, reluctantly. As they near the shore, from a little way down shore, SIMON does emerge from the water, wet, and approaches the fire set up center stage.

Part III: Eating

NATHAN'L:

(calls to SIMON) Have a nice swim?

SIMON:

Very funny.

THOMAS:

What are you looking at?

SIMON:

Someone's lit a charcoal fire here.

NATHAN'L:

There are fish on this rack.

THOMAS:

And a loaf of bread.

JESUS:

(calls to them)

Now bring some of the fish *you* have just caught.

SIMON:

(checks in with the other DISCIPLES)

Did we catch any?

JAMES:

Yeah, as a matter of fact. *We* did.

(everyone looks at SIMON.)

SIMON:

All right, all right. I'll go get them. How many are there?

NATHAN'L:

150.

SIMON:

Sure there are.

THOMAS:

153, to be exact.

JESUS:

(as SIMON moves off to get the fish; still from across the sanctuary)

Come and have breakfast.

(Jesus finally approaches the center.)

THOMAS:

(as JESUS comes up) Is it really you, Lord?

NATHAN'L:

Thomas, do you have to ask?

JAMES:

Yes, haven't we been over all this before?

THOMAS:

(sheepish) It's my calling.

BELOVED:

Of *course* it's really him.

JOHN:

And look at all the fish Simon's dragging to shore.

JESUS:

Simon. You are a marvelous fisherman. I've never seen such a catch.

SIMON:

It's what you told me to do, Lord. Fish for people.

SIMON approaches, dragging the net. JESUS comes and takes the bread and gives it to them, and he does the same with the fish. They eat. Then, the DISCIPLES move off in various directions. JESUS remains.

NARRATOR:

This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Part IV: Following

JESUS:

Simon son of John.

SIMON:

Here I am.

JESUS:

Do you love me more than these? (*indicating the DISCIPLES*)

SIMON:

(doesn't know quite how to react at first) You're kidding, right? You can see I'm soaking wet here for swimming a hundred yards to shore just so I could see you – *(decides abruptly to just answer the question, to see where JESUS is taking this conversation)* Yes.

JESUS:

Feed my lambs.

SIMON:

What does that mean –

JESUS:

Simon son of John, do you love me?

SIMON:

Lord, I don't know what else I can do or say to prove that to you. The moment I heard you were standing on the shore, I threw on my clothes, tied this belt and swam out to meet you... Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.

JESUS:

Tend my sheep.

SIMON:

(indicating all the people in the audience) Do you mean them? Are you blaming for going off on my own? I hauled in these fish by myself just a moment ago, if *that* makes any difference to anyone.

JESUS:

Simon son of John, do you love me?

SIMON:

Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.

(A rooster crows and SIMON falls to the floor.)

JESUS:

Feed my sheep.

Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt (*JESUS unfastens SIMON's belt*) and to go wherever you wish. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands (*JESUS takes SIMON's hands and extends them as though he is being crucified. He then moves behind SIMON and re-fastens his belt*), and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.

(SIMON and JESUS remain center, looking at one another. The other DISCIPLES comes from across the sanctuary in all directions from these two, hold their belts in one hand and begin to pray through their problems.)

NATHAN'L:

Lord, I don't know where you're leading me anymore. I thought I would always have this job. I thought it was what you wanted me to be doing. How could they have let me go?

JOHN:

Lord, I don't know where you're leading me anymore. I've lost someone that I really care about. Whenever I thought about the future, I always thought we would see it together, and now... now, she's gone...

THOMAS:

Lord, I don't know where you're leading me anymore. I got into the program I applied to. I got in! But, there's no money. There's no money to actually go. Maybe this isn't what you had in mind for me after all. Guess I'll find something else to do, somewhere else to go. But where?

JAMES:

Lord, I don't know where you're leading me anymore. I can't get along with my parents. I can't. I've tried. I don't know what else to say to make things better.

JOHN:

Lord, I don't know where you're leading me anymore. A week ago I was healthy, and now... They say I might be dying.

SIMON:

(after a moment) Is that what you're saying? That I'm going to die. *(JESUS says nothing. SIMON lets his arms fall.)* What about being a fisher of people like you told me? What about being the rock on which you build your church? What about fifty years of preaching and then quiet retirement? What's the matter with *that*? Wouldn't anything *else* give glory to God?

JESUS:

(cuts him off) Follow me.

SIMON:

(demands) Where?!

JESUS:

Follow me.

(JESUS moves off. The other DISCIPLES follow. SIMON, last of all, follows.)

THE END