

Lost Stories: Peter's Vision

Welcome to the next installment of the Lost Stories series.

In this story, we hear from the apostle Peter.

Peter has had an intense experience in Joppa, where he had been staying.

He had a vision that he describes in the passage,

And witnessed Gentiles being filled with the same Holy Spirit

That came into the women and men who were present at Pentecost.

This is a big deal because up until this point in the story,

Only Jewish believers had received baptism by water or Spirit.

This created an awkward situation for Peter because in that time

It was OK to socialize or do business with Gentiles,

But Jews were really not supposed to eat meals with them.

The logic is that Gentiles don't keep the Torah's laws about food,

So you would always worry about accidentally eating something unclean.

In today's passage, Peter returns to Jerusalem and catches heat

From the Jewish believers for eating with a Gentile.

They're not being overly critical or judgmental or nitpicky.

They're raising a legitimate question about Peter's behavior.

After all, Peter is a leader in this movement, which up to this point

Has been Jewish people following their Jewish Messiah.

It was very natural for them to assume that the Jesus movement,

And the Holy Spirit that came from the Jewish God,

Were just a Jewish thing.

This story comes from Acts, which is all about how the message of Jesus

Spread across the known world, starting with Jews but then including

Gentiles.

It was written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke,
So I'm choosing to place this story in Luke's universe.
In Luke's universe, Peter joined up with Jesus very early in Jesus' ministry
After Jesus came to Capernaum and did miracles there,
Including healing Peter's mother-in-law.
But according to Luke, Peter only left everything to follow Jesus
After Jesus provided a miraculous catch of fish.
You know the story, they've been fishing all night without success,
And they reluctantly obey Jesus and put their nets in again,
And come up with so many fish it almost sinks the boat.
I say this story is in Luke's universe because in Matthew and Mark,
Jesus just kind of walks by the disciples and calls to them,
And they drop everything and follow him.
They don't include the miraculous fish story at all.
John tells the story of the miraculous fish, but it takes place
At the end of the story with Jesus already risen from the dead.
So we're sticking to the world of Luke and Acts for this story.
In that world, Luke has Peter speaking to the Jerusalem believers
About his vision and his experience at Cornelius' house.
Luke basically just has Peter retell the story from the previous chapter,
And everyone just accepts it, like OK Gentiles are cool now.
We know from later in Acts and other writings that this debate about
Gentiles
And what rules they did or didn't have to follow to be a Christian,
Continued for many years.
So clearly not everyone in the room was convinced right away.
Or if they were all convinced, at least in that moment,

Peter must have had something a little more compelling to say
Than just retelling the story of his vision and visit to Cornelius.
So just as Luke gave Peter a speech to give to the believers in Acts,
This story imagines a speech that Peter could have given
That would have been convincing to the Jewish believers,
But that maybe wouldn't have been captured by Luke,
Writing several decades after these events.
I hope you enjoy it.

My brothers and sisters, I know there's been a big kerfuffle
About me going and eating with a Roman Centurion.
Well, it's true. But you gotta understand the whole story and you gotta trust
me.

You all know I ain't no Pharisee.
I ain't no Rabbi or teacher or preacher.
So I ain't going to start a debate about the Law,
And I ain't going to make some argument about the scripture.
Because you don't gotta be able to read the Law to know the Law,
And what happened with Cornelius ain't up for you scholars to debate.
I may not be an educated man, or even a smart man.

My daddy certainly didn't think so.
He always used to say, "Boy I've seen rocks smarter than you."
And he probably wasn't wrong.

You all didn't know me and the boys back then in Capernaum,
Before Jesus came.

Me and my brother Andrew, and the Zebedee boys over there,
We used to get in all kinds of not-smart situations.
Like the time we tried to cook some fish for dinner
And learned you can't build a cook fire in a wooden boat.
Or that time we started a fight with a bunch of guys
That turned out to be a bunch of mercenary soldiers from Parthia.
Let me tell you, it's been almost 20 years and I'm still hurting from that butt
whipping.

I may not be the sharpest hook in the tackle box,
And when it comes to the Law,
I may not know all the ins and outs and what-have-yous,

But I know the commandments and I never eat unclean food
And I always tell the truth.

That's because of my Momma.

Well, really my wife's Momma but I treat her like my Momma.

She gave me the best advice one time.

She said every time you tell a lie, it's like cutting off a little piece of you.

I always remembered that because I figured if I'm going to end up
Being known as just a common, stinky fisherman like my Daddy,
I should at least be known as an honest one.

So when I tell you all that the same thing that happened to us at Pentecost
Happened to these Gentiles in Cornelius' house,
It hurts my heart that you might doubt my story.

First of all, let's clear something up.

I know we all feel some type of way about the Romans.
Here in the city they're all tough and mean and act like jerks.
But out in the country you kind of get to know them a little.
They're just people, some bad and some good just like us.
And I know what you're going to say.

My Daddy used to say all the same things about the Romans.
I don't have a problem with them, I just don't agree with their lifestyle.
Love the sinner, but hate the sin.

It's fine to have Gentiles around, but do they have to rub our noses in it,
Being all pagan with each other out in public?

Look, I probably said some of that stuff too in the past, I'll admit it.
But look, I ain't no genius but I know what I saw and I know what I heard.
And I'm telling you that God don't care if you're a Gentile or a Roman
soldier

When it comes to the Holy Spirit.
I can tell you that because I seen it with my own eyes.
Look, I feel for you. It was hard for me to get my head around too.
But I always stick to the advice my Momma gave me.
Once ain't nothing, the second time is luck, but the third time
Is God trying to tell you something.
Like when Jesus first showed up in Capernaum.
We had traveling preachers and healers come from time to time,
So when Jesus first cast the demon out of someone in the synagogue,
I figured once ain't nothing.
Then he came to our house and my Momma was in bed with a fever.
Of course she was more upset that she couldn't get up
And cook for our guest and show him her hospitality.
And believe it or not, after Jesus healed her and her fever went away,
I'll be danged if she didn't spend the whole evening
Fussing over him and cooking up a storm.
A bunch of people from town came over and Jesus healed them too.
I thought, well that's the second time.
That's some good luck for us that a healer came through
And took care of Momma and everyone else.
So me and the boys kind of looked out for Jesus for a while,
When the crowds started showing up like crazy.
The way people crowded all around him,
You would have thought he was handing out free beer and doughnuts.
We did a little basic crowd control for him,
Keeping people from squishing him like a little holy little bug.
Then it got so bad we had to put him in the boat

And let him preach from there.

I wasn't going to do much more than that.

Andrew talked about following Jesus to the next town,

But I told him Daddy needed our help with the fishing.

His knee had been getting bad and he couldn't do it alone.

I wasn't going nowhere unless I knew Daddy was going to be ok for a while.

After he was done preaching, Jesus asked us to take him fishing.

We was laughing because there weren't no fish over in that part of the lake.

We already fished it the night before and didn't catch squat.

But I'll be danged if that net didn't come up fuller than

A port-a-potty at a taco festival.

We almost sank the dang boat with all those fish,

And Zebedee's boys had to come help out.

Not only was my Daddy going to have a big old payday,

But that was the third time I saw Jesus do a miracle with my own eyes.

I may not be the world's smartest man.

My Daddy used to say, "If you were a rock in the water, you wouldn't know how to sink."

I ain't a scholar, but I know what I seen and I know what I heard.

And after that 3rd miracle I knew God was trying to tell me something.

My Momma is a wise lady. When something happens 3 times, God's talking to you.

So let me tell you what happened in Joppa.

I was on the roof, praying. I was hungry.

My buddy Simon the tanner's wife...whoo boy can she cook.

I was up there praying and I could smell that dinner.

I was hungrier than a seagull staring at a pile of fish guts when you clean
your catch.

I was thinking about food, when I saw a fishing net come down from the
sky.

But it wasn't full of fish you can eat or even sell.

I'll be danged if that fish net wasn't bursting full of creepy-crawlies.

There was lizards and bugs and nasty vultures pecking at a pig carcass.

There was enough unclean animals in there

I thought God was going to strike me with leprosy just for looking at it.

But instead I heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

I know you probably think I'm crazy.

But we've all seen some pretty weird stuff since Jesus came around,

So I've learned to just kinda roll with it.

I figured the voice might be some kind of demon creature,

Like the ones Jesus sent into those pigs back in Galilee.

But the voice came again, and it said.

"What God has made clean, you must not call unclean."

Well I sat up and I thought to myself, Peter,

You must be dumber than a bag of hammers. Even your dreams is dumb.

If God's going to talk to you, the last thing God's gonna say

Is to forget about the Torah and eat creepy-crawlies.

That's what I thought, but I'll be danged if it didn't happen again

Two more times!

Well, you know what Momma said,

When it happens three times God's trying to tell you something.

I knew God was telling me something, but what?

I was more confused than a dog tick on a bird's hind end.

But just then some guys showed up looking for me.
They was Gentiles, including a Roman Soldier.
But I knew God was trying to tell me something that day,
Even if I didn't yet know exactly what.
If God can tell me to eat creepy-crawlies, I thought,
I better get ready for a weird day.
Let me tell you, my brothers and sisters,
As I live and breathe, I didn't figure it out until
I got to Cornelius' house and his servant started washing my feet.
All of a sudden I was back in that room with Jesus the night he got
arrested.
The night when he washed all our feet.
I was against it, remember?
I felt like it was wrong for someone as Holy as the Messiah
To wash the dirty feet of someone like me.
I ain't the worst person in the world, but like I said before,
I had a kinda rough-and-tumble past before Jesus came along.
All of a sudden it hit me like a rock to the back of the head.
If Jesus could make a disciple out of me, why not Cornelius?
He already don't worship idols like the rest of them.
He's got his whole household praying and worshiping God
Just like a Jewish person would do.
If Jesus could wash me clean, who was I to call Cornelius unclean.
Now I know what you're thinking.
You've heard about these God-fearing Gentiles
Who pray and keep away from idols and eating blood and whatnot.
People say, I'm fine with Gentiles who worship God,

Just as long as they stay out of my synagogue.
I just don't feel comfortable with someone who lives that lifestyle
Participating in worship or leading prayers.
Well you can take those thoughts and toss them in the garbage pit,
Because the Lord himself done showed me the truth.
When I preached the good news to them about Jesus,
I'll be danged if the Holy Spirit didn't fill them up
Just like what happened to us at Pentecost.
We was all praying and hooting and hollering
And speaking other languages and everything.
I may not be the world's biggest expert on religion,
But I know what I seen and I know what I heard.
And I'm telling you that God is filling up Gentiles with the Holy Spirit,
Whether you agree with their lifestyle or not.
It turns out God don't have the same hangups as we do.
So you can fuss and grumble about it.
You can talk among yourselves about how Peter's a bad Jew
For eating with Gentiles.
But I learned that day you can't call unclean what God has made clean.
God gets to choose whoever God wants to choose.
A few years ago God chose a bunch of rowdy, ignorant fishermen
To help get the word out about the Messiah.
At Pentecost God chose all of us sinners to fill with the Holy Spirit,
So full of fire and hooting and hollering and speaking other languages
That everyone thought we was drunk out of our gourds.
And when I went to Cornelius house, God choose a bunch of Gentiles
And gave them the same gift God gave us.

I ain't no expert scholar educated genius here.
But I know what I seen and I know what I heard.
And if you can't see that this good news about Jesus
Is supposed to be for everybody, even Gentiles,
Then you might be even dumber than me.