

Witness for Peter

A Play in One Act

by

SMSmith



Apostles Peter & Andrew (Martorana)

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Preface

This work is intended as a reconsideration of the Apostle Simon Peter and his denial on the night of the trials of Jesus of Nazareth. The rationale for this play can be found at the end of this document; and it is recommended that you read this Author's Note before reading the play.

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Witness for Peter

by SMSmith

[A Play in One Act with one actor,
the Apostle Andrew]

TIME: circa 65 A.D.

PLACE: near the Sea of Galilee

AT RISE: We see an old man of New Testament times sitting on a low wooden stool mending a net, near the door of a fisherman's hut (or near a simple row boat on the shoreline). The man is ANDREW (Simon Peter's brother), stocky with white hair and beard. Throughout the play, ANDREW'S tone is never sarcastic; he simply states the truth as he sees it. As HE works and speaks, HE may move about for various pur-

poses. The soft sound of lapping water may underscore the play at times.

Moments after the RISE, ANDREW raises his head listening. He observes his arriving guests (of course, unseen by the audience).

ANDREW

(Nodding in greeting.)

Of course. As you please. ... I have been expecting you.

You have been asking questions.

I doubt you need to ask, but yes—I am brother to Simon Peter [1]. Your killing of him did not change that.

I was speaking of your consent to it. Whether it comes before or after seems of little consequence.

I speak merely what I observe, as you, undoubtedly, report what you observe.

Perhaps, but if kinship clouds my vision ...
what of yours?

Perhaps not, but what of anger? ... fear? ...
error?

Because your every stone has a name as does
your every cross and every nail.

If you are moved to anger, I—

Then let us neither be offended in our appointed tasks. And this is mine. I do best when my hands are thus.

Forgive me, but when men say they wish
merely to listen, they seem all too soon overwhelmed to speech.

I am content, then—to talk, to listen—I imagine it will make little difference. You will, like most, come and go, believing what you believe.

Indeed! You come for the truth? to clear my brother's name? ...

(Sighs, shakes HIS head, shrugs.)

All right then; as you please.

I suppose, I no longer plague the people with the truth of that night because other truths take precedence. It will all come out in the end.

There is no point in belaboring it. I have lost my energy for those who do not wish to comprehend.

I was there. I know what I heard. I know what I saw. I know what I understood.

Yes, I know others heard; that some say, they

did not hear as I, but do we ever hear the same things?

Words have interpretations, so when we are done with this brief encounter, I suspect each of you shall have heard differently, too. And I venture, if your report of this were unrehearsed, you would have trouble convicting me of anything but a desire to end the maligning of my dead brother.

Some may think so, but I was never one to turn a blind eye to his faults; just as you are not here to turn a blind eye to mine. Could this be your purposes in coming?

What our lips speak is sometimes not what our hearts beat, but let us proceed.

No, I was never his shadow. It cannot even be measured; and though I charged him in beginning days with diverse failings, cowardice was

not amongst them. That was never a failing—least of all on that night you so willingly recall.

The truth? The truth is—no one, save our risen Master, knew him better than I. That was why he was commanded. Yes, that is still my witness. I knew the intent as surely as my brother knew it; even as I now know the intent of your misreading.

No, my friends. This was not a prophecy of failings—it was a direction against my brother's nature. I was there. I saw. I heard. He bore into my brother's eyes and He spoke with compelling, undeniable power, "Thou shalt deny me thrice" [2].

Yes, my witness has been denied, but the greatest act of denial was not my brother's. He obeyed—beyond all comprehension. It broke his heart and spirit [3] ... for a purpose you refuse to comprehend.

All right, I shall tell you—but this I think shall be the last for I am old. I am also now convinced it does not much matter. Like all history, truth and error will plague the retelling of this, yet in some future time, it shall all be revealed. And who knows, in the spanning years, these errors you take such pains to advance, may serve quite useful purpose. Who knows?

(Sighs.)

The beginning? ... It was with John whom we called the Baptist. I see you have not forgotten him.

Yes, you could call me John's disciple [4]. But Simon?—he was first and foremost a fisherman—a disciple of the sea. He was not one, as he said, to go tramping the wilderness for he knew not what—and yet when I spoke of those things from the wilderness, he listened [5]. And when the Master called, he—we—went without hesitation [6].

Yes, he was impulsive. He was always a man of action. He asked more questions, spoke more boldly, acted more quickly, and had more ideas than the rest of us together [7]. That should be witness in itself toward my witness.

Yes, I told you that before: it was me who told him I had found, as you say, the Nazarene—and if you desire more, I say also, that Nazarene proved our Messiah, our promised Lord, our King of kings, our—

When you ask concerning Simon Peter, you will also hear concerning Him.

All right, we shall focus on my brother. Could this be one of your purposes—gathering evidence to shore up against past executions?

And if the evidence does not support your suppositions ,,,?

All right for the record then, you may ask your questions.

Yes, that is true—he was reprimanded [8] ... perhaps more than any other. But that also goes to prove my contention. My brother's focus was always to act. More times than I can remember he was ready to wade in without thought of consequence. He was loyal and he was fearless.

If he had set his hand to stopping the events of that night—they would not have proceeded as they did. The revolt he could have commanded with scant notice—with his passion and impulse in support of our beloved master—is beyond your imaginings. ... When I contemplate even now, with all that has passed, I shudder to think, as did he—many times—how close he came to not denying.

No, you do not comprehend. The greatest

denial of that night was himself. How close he came to not denying his passion for justice; for truth as he saw it; for action. And surely your spies—perhaps even some of you—heard Peter’s witness so many times before he was killed—of fiery trials more precious than gold [9]. He knew whereof he spoke. And I saw, as some began to twist the story of that night, how he came to know what it meant to do well and to suffer for it and to take it patiently [10].

Why so intrigued with the reprimands of him? Do you think that proves his unworthiness, too?

No, my brother was not afraid to recall those reprimands. He spoke of them many times: how they were well-deserved knockings against his roughness. His confessions proved the man he was and the man he became.

Yes, he was an impatient man who learned—as I witnessed—the way of patience.

All right, I find no harm in it. Read from your lists and I shall confirm what I can.

If he was accused of little faith [11], yet he had the courage to try. Would any of you have stepped out to walk on water? For myself, I can say—my brother walked those waves to my utter amazement before the reality of it seized him. It was never within me to think less of him for that. It was never within me, nor I suspect in any of you, even to try it.

(Smiles.)

When you step one beyond his, perhaps you can speak then.

Of course I don't deny it. That correction was very public. Some of you were no doubt there; perhaps even raised the question of tribute; perhaps even witnessed that tribute still wet from the fish's mouth [12]. It was a lesson to us all—to all who has ears to hear and eyes to see.

Cutting off the servant's ear? [13] Yes, it was a rebuke, but if that is your next instance—you must have a very short list; so, I will give you of others because it was always his drive to action that brought rebuke. That was his great strength and his great weakness. So, I am sure you will favor this one. Let me recall the words as best I remember. The Master turned to him and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men" [14].

Yes, I knew you would appreciate that one. Does your scribe there wish me to repeat the words?

Our Lord said those words because Peter had given his own rebuke to the Master's prophesy of His own death [15]. That was the first time He told how He would suffer many things at the hands of your employers and how He

would be killed and then be raised again the third day.

No, we did not understand the import of his words. No. And because we did not, my brother offered his own life [16] in defense of our Lord. And was rebuked severely as I have told; a rebuke we did not understand either. And then, more times than I can recall, the Master repeated Himself in the prophecies of His death [17] upon our deaf ears, and each time, though the words were spoken to us all, I am witness to where His eyes became fixed. They pierced my brother's soul—scorching against his passion for aggressively defending justice and truth, if need be, to the death. And after that final supper, as we stood upon the Mount of Olives, He told how we would all be offended because of Him that very night [18]. My brother answered and said, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" [19]. And that was when

our Master gave His piercing command. "That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." But we all denied His words as Peter did. We said: That though we should die with Him, yet we would not deny Him [20]. But He looked upon each of us and somehow we knew—we could not, we must not deny Him the course that lay before Him; that He was, incomprehensively, appointed to death; that even in our uncomprehending, we had to stand aside. And yes, I speak for myself. I was offended in those moments. I was offended that He would not look to us to defend him. I was offended that He would so meekly suffer such injustice and mockery. I was offended that the powers we could have rallied to our just cause would lie idle and wasted. I was offended that the devotion we offered was rejected. We were all offended in our ignorance. But being helpless and outnumbered, nine of us forsook Him and fled as He directed [21]. There was little power in our meager band without His

consent: without the masses that would have stood to our backs had He but given us leave to ask. But Peter and John did not flee [22]. Peter drew his sword in your midst and would have wreaked what havoc he could, save for the Master's hand [23]. And thereafter Peter followed. He followed into the darkened chambers of your unlawful trials. He watched as your false witnesses failed you [24]. He ached to shout his witness in the silent refusal of your captive to speak to His own defense. My brother's heart nigh burst to hold itself still as you spit and smote and mocked the God of Heaven. But he held himself silent—suffering beyond any telling—agonizing in uncomprehending obedience. Agonizing because his Master had just said to him: "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" [25] And yes, he did curse in the agony of his obedience [26]. //

You call yourselves the children of Abraham and you repeat the accusatory account of this denial as if you knew anything. Well, unlike you, Peter met his holy test. He stood as staunch as Abraham; as enduring as Job; as steadfast as every soul that has suffered and endured incomprehensible contradiction. My brother suffered his personal agony in that place. He lived because he surrendered his will. He lived to carry the truth you could not kill. He lived because he obeyed. He lived because he denied himself and his discipleship when he would have given his all had it been possible. He lived and his Lord died because my brother obeyed. And when the cock hailed the beginning of day, he went weeping bitterly [27].

He wept for you, my friends. He wept for his Lord. He wept for his own loneliness and his incomprehension. And he wept because rising from crucified death was a myriad times more incredible than walking upon a tumultuous sea.

No—you will find no convert here to your impossibilities. I was witness to both. I saw what I saw. One is risen, and the other shall hereafter be risen.

Because he obeyed, he lived. My brother lived to give us his strength till you took his life. He'd had too many witnesses [28] to deny what he knew for a surety. Even beyond our Master's witness, Peter had heard a voice from heaven declaring the Son [29]; and not one of us could forget the Master's emphatic warning that: "whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" [30]. To have denied the divinity of the Son would be as to deny the blazing sun at noonday. There was never such denial. Such was impossible for any of us, even when we did not understand how He would—could—rise from crucified death.

Not so. Why do you think we accepted his

immediate leadership without reserve? That is witness, too. He rallied us. He comforted us. He was the first that Mary came to with the news that the tomb was empty [31]. And when he heard, he rushed to see [32] still not fully comprehending. These were not the actions of a man racked with guilt, but of one who had submitted beyond ... almost beyond hope [33].

No. His rush was not to prove his denial never mattered. Thereafter, our Lord appeared to Peter before the others [34]? He revealed himself to Peter to affirm, as you still claim, the impossible news of resurrection. It was to affirm, in ecstasy, that Peter's denial of self [35] had indeed mattered in the plan of his God.

Yes, I understand; you repeat merely what you have heard. And perhaps you have heard how our Lord remained with us for 40 days after His rising [36]. Did you know that?

Well, it is true. I was there. We were instructed in things beyond imagination; and from the moment of our Lord's very first appearance to us, we knew that Peter was the one commissioned to lead us forward under divine direction.

No, there was never one moment of doubt in any of us about Peter's standing [37]. And how I wish words were sufficient to describe my brother's joy at seeing his risen Lord. It was the same joy that propelled him headlong out of the boat several days later when we realized that our Lord had come again to greet us on the seashore [38]. So, once again, you see; Peter was always a man of action; charging waist deep through water to embrace his Master.

Oh, I see, you have heard of this alleged visit on the seashore, as you call it; nonetheless, the account is true, but not as you suggest.

Yes, those were his words, "Lovest thou me?"
[39]

Yes, they were spoken thrice.

(Smiling.)

You must be a lawyer, to seek proof in such a round-about-way—concerning a matter you claim could not have happened.

That could be an ingenious thought—but let me assure you. My brother's avowals were not meant to cancel three cowardly denials. Had you been there you would know and you would have seen how grieved my brother felt to be asked a third time if he loved his resurrected Lord.

No; grieved because he knew he had demonstrated that love, short days before.

What our Lord was telling him—telling me and

telling you—was that obedience to His will, whether to act or to refrain from acting, weighs equally in the plan of God. What He was telling my brother was that justice was not Peter's battle here. My brother was to forever sheath his sword and to take up the shepherd's stave.

I speak what I know.

I suppose, because I would rather offend you than my Lord. And yes, I speak too, because some of you may be more persuaded than offended. That is why we will not be silenced, because as He commissioned us, we feed His sheep.

You may put your coins away. My witness is not for sale.

I am too old a man to cower before such limited power.

(Sighing)

I speak what I must. I told you that in the beginning.

Your reach is not sufficient. Your dungeons, your mocking trials, your crosses will never silence the greater witness my brother gave his life for. The greater witness thousands shall yet live and die for.

As God wills, though I cannot but find it amusing you think to topple this tent of our Lord. He governs beyond your reach, and ones such as I who merely lend tautness to the lines can be quickly replaced. Our Lord is gone and the work goes on. Peter is dead and it goes on. I am nothing compared to them and dozens of others whose blood, even now, stains your garments. Yet, the work goes on.

Rome is nothing compared to the reach of this.

I am sorry you are offended—that Rome is of-

fended. But as I said at the outset, I have my task and you have yours.

Yes, I am sometimes here; more often teaching, somewhere, near or far. I am not hard to find for those who seek me.

For my part I am not sorry. There shall prove, somewhere, good purpose in this—no matter how it appears. That is how it always is. How it always will be.

You see, 'tis as I said. You have come and now you go, believing what you already believed. Though there is now one of you who stands at the brink.

No, as you please. I stand by what I have said. I should only repeat what I have said. ... May God go with you.

*(Raises HIS hand as they depart,
speaking softly to himself.)*

Oh, my friends, it is not discernible wolves like you that threaten us most. ... He told us that, too [40]. But this I know— whatever comes, His promises are sure. So much we do not, ... will not see or know ... till then.

THE END

(New Testament Sources below)
(Author's Note follow on pages 27-31)

New Testament Sources:

- [1] Matthew 4:18; 10:2; Mark 1:16; Luke 6:14; John 1:40-41
- [2] Matthew 26:34; Mark 14:30; Luke 22:34; John 13:38
- [3] Matthew 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:62
- [4] John 1:35-41
- [5] John 1:41-42
- [6] Matthew 4:18-20; Mark 1:16-18; Luke 5:10-11; John 1:40-42
- [7] Matthew 15:15; 17:4; 18:21; 19:27; Mark 9:2-5; 10:28; 11:21; 13:3-4; Luke 5:3-9, 11; 8:45; 9:33; 12:41; 18:28; 22:8-9; John 6:68-69; 13:4-10, 24, 36-38; 21:3-11, 20-21
- [8] Matthew 15:15-17; 16:5-11, 23; 17:24-25; 26:40-41; Mark 8:33; 14:33, 37-38; 16:14; Luke 22:31-32, 46; John 13:5-10; John 18:11

- [9] 1 Peter 1:7
- [10] 1 Peter 2:19-20
- [11] Matthew 14:28-31
- [12] Matthew 17:24-27
- [13] John 18:10; Luke 22:50-51
- [14] Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33
- [15] Matthew 16:22; Mark 8:32
- [16] Matthew 26:33-35; Mark 14:29-31; Luke 22:33; John 13:37
- [17] Matthew 12:40, 16:21, 17:12, 22-23; 20:18-19; 26:2, 12, 31; Mark 8:31; 9:9-10, 31; 10:32-34; 14:8; Luke 9:22, 44; 18:31-34; 24:5-8; John 12:32-33
- [18] Matthew 26:31-33; Mark 14:27-29
- [19] Matthew 26:33; Mark 14:29
- [20] Matthew 26:33-35; Mark 14:31
- [21] John 18:8-9
- [22] John 18:15; Matthew 26:58; Mark 14:54; Luke 22:54
- [23] John 18:10; Matthew 26:51-54
- [24] Matthew 26:59-61, Mark 14:55-59
- [25] Matthew 26:53-54
- [26] Matthew 26:74; Mark 14:71
- [27] Matthew 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:62
- [28] Matthew 16:16-17; 17:1-6; Mark 8:29, 9:5-7; Luke 9:20, 33-36; John 17(intercessory prayer witnessed by Apostles?)
- [29] Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35
- [30] Matthew 10:33, 12:31-32; Luke 9:26, 12:8-9
- [31] John 20:2
- [32] Luke 24:12, 24; John 20:2-6
- [33] Luke 24:12
- [34] 1 Corinthians 15:4-5; Luke 24:34
- [35] Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23
- [36] Acts 1:3
- [37] Acts 1:15; 2:14; Mark 16:7; John 20:2
- [38] John 21:7
- [39] John 21:15-17
- [40] Matthew 7:15

Author's Note:

Every so often the topic of the Apostle Peter's denials surfaces for discussion, and each time, I have felt we were missing something vital in the accepted interpretation of those accounts. Then in the early 1990s, I read a talk¹ by Spencer W. Kimball that opened the door, just a crack, for re-analysis. I decided to put my thoughts into a one-act play, "Witness for Peter" and did so in 1995. (It has remained, with minor tweaks, in various incarnations of electronic storage since that time.) Several years after writing it, I discovered a talk² by Bruce C. Hafen, then president of Ricks College, wherein the crack for re-analysis widened. Then in 2005, I encountered a discussion³ at TimesandSeasons.org wherein a Greek word was presented as a trump against such re-analysis. In defense of Peter, I left a comment as follows:

11/4/2005 at 8:04 pm

Belated caution re post #17

Proposition: As no original manuscripts remain to prove the compositional language(s) of the Gospels; as there is no consensus amongst scholars or historians about the use of Greek in those originals; as most of the relied-upon, copied texts for the KJV are distant from the original

authors by several hundred years; as interpretive choices in translation work, even by well-meaning translators, can, and often do, change meaning and intent (not to mention, “corrective” or “correlative” interpolations made by copyists and translators); therefore, it is questionable whether we know the precise words spoken by the Lord and whether the words have been accurately transmitted (e.g., compare the synoptic gospels with John’s). And more to the point, we cannot know with certainty how the Lord meant His words—probably spoken in Aramaic—to be understood.

Perhaps, in fairness to Peter, the safest course is not to take a dogmatic position either way, but to ask, as Spencer W. Kimball, “Are we sure of his motive in that recorded denial?” And then, to not be afraid of uncertainty about the matter (see, Bruce C. Hafen, “On Dealing with Uncertainty,” *BYU Devotional*, 9 January 1979, *Ensign*, Aug. 1979, 63-4 where he also addresses the Peter question).

On Nov. 29, 2011, I discovered a thoughtful, scholarly analysis⁴ by Andrew Skinner, that is worth the

consideration of every soul who wonders about Peter—an analysis that seems to ably answer the “Greek trump.”

Not only does the “command interpretation” appear possible, but does it not fit within the pattern of “Abrahamic” tests that God seems to require of all who follow in the footsteps of His Son? A pattern that requires a complete submission of will⁵, of nature, of passion, and sometimes, of possessions (Mark 10:17-22)? If Christ had to suffer great contradiction⁶, and Abraham, Job, Mary & Joseph, Joseph & Emma, and nigh every scriptural prophet, and many saints and sages in the triumph over self, *why* not Peter?

For some this is an intensely emotional issue. For them it deeply offends the scriptural account. Yet, is it not strange that the Apostle John, who was present at the trials and witness to the events first-hand, does not include any remark about Peter’s sudden recollection of his Lord’s words when the cock crew?

Also, in this analysis, the inconsistencies in Peter’s character do not arise. As well, Peter seems to have had no reservation about rushing to the empty tomb or of meeting his risen Master three days af-

ter his awful denial; nor did the Church seem to hold Simon Peter in less esteem for what would surely have been seen as a monumental failing. So shouldn't we be willing to hear all the evidence before making as reasoned a judgment as possible in the circumstances?

Of course, we cannot know the full truth of that night, but does it not seem credible that this was a night of supreme testing for Peter, which, as we see with Abraham and others, came as a high unbearable contradiction (and denial) of his bold character and convictions—to submit his will, against every inclination, to God's will?

Even if it turns out that Simon Peter failed this test⁷, the account still testifies to the great cleansing power of repentance and to the efficacy of the realized atonement.

"Author Notes" Footnotes

[1] Given in 1971 and now found at <http://emp.byui.edu/marrottr/GenlAuthorities/PeterMyBrother.pdf>

[2] Given in 1979 and now found at <http://lds.org/ensign/1979/08/on-dealing-with-uncertainty?lang=eng>

[3] <http://timesandseasons.org/index>.

php/2005/02/peter/

[4] <http://emp.byui.edu/marrottr/211FOLDER/Peters%20Denial.pdf>

[5] <http://dejavu-timestwo.blogspot.com/search/label/WILL>

[6] <http://dejavu-timestwo.blogspot.com/2009/09/agonies-of-contradictions.html>

[7] I am aware of Gordon B. Hinckley's talk on Peter, but find other thoughts and analyses more persuasive.

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