

Simon Says
By Miriam Thor

“Hurry up!” Mama snapped. I jumped and began stirring the pot of soup with more vigor.

“Honestly, girl, I’m not sure we would ever eat if I wasn’t here to prod you,” she said, coming into the cooking area. “Maybe if I would’ve moved in here sooner, your husband would have stuck around.” I sighed, hurt by her words, despite having heard the same sentiment many times before.

“Simon didn’t leave me,” I said. “He still sends money to help us get by and stays here when he’s in Galilee.”

Mama rolled her eyes. “He made more money as a fisherman,” she said. “And I won’t get grandchildren if he’s only here a few nights a year.”

“Mama!” I gasped, my cheeks flooding with color. She looked at me without contrition.

“Well, it’s true,” she said. I didn’t say anything. I knew it was true.

“Why don’t you go lie down while I finish cooking supper?” I asked her instead. She narrowed her eyes, clearly wanting to continue the discussion. After a moment, she nodded.

“Fine. At the rate you’re going, I’ll be able to take a nice, long nap before we eat.”

With that somewhat ominous prediction, she left, and I heaved a sigh of relief. I knew the soup would be ready soon, but finishing it would be more pleasant without Mama there to criticize my every move. Mama had always been like that. When I was

little, she made me cry at least once a day with her sharp tongue. As I got older, I developed a thick skin to guard against her barbs and could ignore them for the most part. Her comments about Simon were different, though. I couldn't ignore them because deep down, I wondered if they were true.

I took the pot off the hook over the fire and set it on the table to cool. As I stirred the soup, I thought back to the day my life had changed forever.

Simon had come home in the middle of the day, which was unusual in itself. Normally, he stayed out on the lake all day, trying to catch as many fish as possible. I saw him coming up the path to our house and met him at the door.

"Simon," I said, "is everything alright?"

He smiled at me, eyes shining. "It's better than alright," he said. "Jesus has asked me to follow him."

Jesus? I thought, trying to place the name. Oh right, I remembered, the teacher from Nazareth. Simon had mentioned him before.

"Follow him?" I repeated. "Follow him where?"

"I don't know," Simon said. "Wherever he goes, I suppose." He threw a few things into a sack. I stared at him, stunned, as I realized he was packing things he would need for a long journey.

"How long will you be gone?" I asked, trying to keep the panic out of my voice.

"I don't know," he replied and turned to leave.

"Simon," I called desperately. "What am I to do while you're gone?"

He glanced at me, obviously not understanding why I was upset. "Mind the house like you always do," he said. Then, he turned and was gone.

With a deep sigh, I pulled myself back to the present and the soup that was cool enough to eat.

“Mama!” I yelled. “Dinner’s ready!”

A few days later, I was washing clothes by the stream when Matthias walked up to me.

“Shalom,” he said in greeting.

“Shalom,” I replied in kind.

Matthias was a traveling merchant and friend of the family. Simon often used him to deliver money to me because he knew he could trust him. I was relieved to see him. It had been weeks since I’d received money from Simon, and the cupboards were getting bare.

“Simon asked me to bring you this,” Matthias said, holding out a few denarii.

“Thank you,” I said, taking the coins. “Where did you see Simon? Did he seem well?”

“In Nazareth,” he said. “And yes, he was well. Still following that...prophet.” I could hear the skepticism and disapproval in his voice. “He asked me to tell you that they will be coming to Capernaum soon and that they will be coming to your house to eat.”

My heart lifted for a moment and then fell like a stone. All thirteen of Simon’s friends would be eating at our house? Even with the denarii he’d just sent me, I wasn’t sure I’d have enough to buy food for all of them. I tried to hide my feelings from

Matthias. There was no reason to make him disapprove of our lives any more than he already did.

“Thank you, Matthias,” I said. “You are a good friend to us.”

He smiled. “You’re welcome,” he said. “Shalom.” Then, he walked away.

I gathered the clothes into my basket and began walking home, the denarii clutched in my hand. As I walked, I tried to decide how I would use them to buy what we needed and food for thirteen people. It wouldn’t be easy. I would have to haggle with people at the market, which I hated. Maybe I could convince Mama to go; it would put that tongue of hers to good use for a change. Thinking of Mama, I grimaced. She was not going to be happy when she found out a group of thirteen men were coming to eat at our house.

“That good-for-nothing imbecile!”

Mama banged her bowl on the table angrily, and I closed my eyes to gather strength. I’d decided to wait until dinner to give her the news, hoping it might distract her enough that she wouldn’t throw a tantrum. So much for that theory.

“Simon is my husband, Mama,” I said placatingly. “He has every right to request a meal for him and his...friends.”

“Your husband in name only!” she snapped. “He thinks he can leave you for months on end and then demand a banquet upon his return?!”

“He did send money to pay for it,” I argued feebly. It did seem like an unfair request.

“Probably because his brother told him to,” Mama said. I remained silent. I’d thought for a long time that Andrew might be the only reason we continued to receive coins. My brother-in-law had a gift for remembering details that Simon had always lacked.

“That man left a perfectly respectable fishing career to follow some lunatic around and then expects—”

“Mama, stop!” I yelled, unable to take it anymore. It was bad enough that I had these thoughts in my head without having her scream them at me. “Simon says this man is a prophet! Simon says he’s the Messiah!”

“Simon says, Simon says,” Mama mimicked. “You believe anything that man says! He could tell you this lunatic had risen from the dead, and you would still believe him!” She got up from the table, glaring at me. “*The Messiah?* Do you honestly think the Messiah would want anything to do with your sorry-excuse-for-a-husband?” With that, she stalked out of the room.

Tears filled my eyes. I wanted to believe Simon. He was my husband, and it was a wife’s duty to believe her husband. Even more than that, I wanted it to be true because it would make all the hardships worth it. But part of me thought Mama was right. What kind of Messiah would want fishermen from Galilee as his closest followers?

Mama and I went to bed without speaking that night. The next morning, I got up and started a fire. As I prepared breakfast, I noticed Mama hadn’t gotten up yet.

“Mama!” I yelled in the nicest tone I could muster. No answer.

Was she still mad from our fight last night? I wondered. Was she so mad that she was refusing to talk to me? That would be a first. I walked out of the cooking area and entered the room where she slept. She was still lying down. That's when I knew something wasn't right. She never slept this late.

"Mama?" I asked, anger melting into concern. No answer.

"Mama?" I repeated and walked over to her pallet. I knelt down and gently shook her shoulder. Mama's eyes fluttered, but she still said nothing. I put my hand to her head and gasped. She was burning up.

I quickly went to work, doing everything she'd ever taught me to do for someone with a fever. I soaked a cloth in water and put it on her forehead. I gave her herbs that supposedly helped with sickness. None of it worked. She stayed in a fevered haze.

I didn't know what to do. We couldn't afford to pay a doctor to come, and the Pharisees from the local synagogue never took the time to come to people's houses and pray for them. I was at a loss.

In desperation, I knelt down and prayed to God myself. I knew I wasn't a priest and that God probably wouldn't listen to the prayers of someone as insignificant as me. But it was the only thing left to be done.

"Please, Jehovah Rapha," I whispered. *God the Healer*. "I don't think I can live here on my own. Simon's as good as gone, so Mama is all I have. Please heal her. Please..." Tears cascaded down my cheeks.

I stood up and checked on Mama. No change. As I wiped my tears away, I wondered why I'd even hoped God might care about the prayers of a Galilean fisherman's abandoned wife.

I stayed by Mama's side all that day and through the night. The following morning I was exhausted, so I lay down on the dirt floor next to her, planning to rest for just a few minutes.

I awoke to the sound of our door opening and someone's voice calling my name. I jumped up in a panic.

"Who's there?" I called, running toward the doorway. When I got there, my eyes widened in dismay. Simon stood there, along with a group of men. Some of them I recognized, including Andrew and Zebedee's two sons. Some of them I'd never seen before, but it didn't matter. I knew who they were. I looked down quickly, all too aware of my rumpled clothing and the hair hanging loose down my back.

"What's wrong with you?" Simon yelled. "Do you think you can dress like this just because I'm not here?" I flinched and kept my eyes downcast. I didn't think Simon would strike me. Despite his temper, he never had before. Then again, I had never embarrassed him in front of his friends before.

"I'm so s-s-s-sorry," I stammered. "I—"

"Sorry?" Simon repeated. "You—"

"Peter," one of the men interrupted quietly but with authority. "Enough. Can't you see that she is in distress?"

Simon stopped abruptly. Later, I would wonder why this man had called him Peter, but at that moment, I didn't give it much thought. Despite my embarrassment over my appearance, I looked up at the man gratefully.

"What's wrong, my daughter?" he asked, his voice and eyes full of compassion.

“My mother is sick with a very high fever. I think she’s going to…” My voice broke, so I swallowed and tried again. “I don’t think she’s going to make it.”

“Peace,” he said gently. “All will be well. Where is your mother?”

“In there,” I said, pointing him in the right direction. The man walked toward the room.

“Please don’t,” I protested. “She—”

Simon silenced me with a firm hand on my arm. “The Lord will take care of her,” he assured me quietly.

The Lord? I thought. Then, I realized that the man was Jesus, the one Simon said was the Messiah. If he really was, maybe he could help Mama. Maybe he could—

“What are you doing just standing there, girl?” Mama demanded, walking through the doorway. I stared at her, too stunned to speak.

“And why is your hair down in the presence of men?” she continued. “You must go fix it at once. It’s not decent!” Her words broke me free of my stupor. I ran over and threw my arms around her.

“What is the matter with you?” she muttered, pushing me away. “These men clearly need a meal, and here you are just staring at them like a sheep.”

I ignored her insult and looked around for Jesus, the one Simon called Lord. He was standing with the other men. Our eyes met, and suddenly, I knew that Simon had been telling the truth. I understood who this man was, and it made sense that my husband had to follow Him, even if it meant leaving me behind.

“Thank you, Lord,” I said and with tears in my eyes, I walked over and bowed at His feet. My hair fell down around my shoulders, but I didn’t care.

“Well,” Mama huffed, “I guess I’ll have to fix the meal myself.” She headed for the cooking fire looking disgruntled.

Jesus touched my shoulder, and I looked up at Him. “Peace, my daughter,” He said. “Go rest. All will be well.”

I nodded, too full of emotion to speak and then went and lay down. When I awoke, they had all left, even Simon. Mama nagged me about leaving her to cook a meal for a large group by herself. She also complained about Simon leaving again to follow “the lunatic.” Her words didn’t hurt me anymore, though, because I knew my husband was following the Messiah, and that was all that mattered.

Many years have passed since my first encounter with the Lord, and a lot has changed since then. Simon...I never have adjusted to calling him Peter... still leaves fairly often, traveling to different towns and sharing the Good News of the Lord’s death and resurrection, just as he was commanded. I’m proud of my husband and understand why he has to go, even if it still means leaving me behind. Jehovah Jirah, *God the Provider*, has blessed Simon and me with several sons who look out for me when their father is away. Every day, I remind my sons what the Lord has done for them. I tell them they have to be ready because their father says that the Lord will come back one day. And if I have learned anything over the years, it is that I should always believe what Simon says.