

I Was There!

by Rev. Wayne C. Deloach
Peace Lutheran Church
Dresser, Wisconsin
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Good morning, my friends! My name is John.
And I know that it's early, but stifle the yawn!
I've a story to tell, you won't hardly believe!
A story so great! And I won't deceive.

I want you to know about all that he did,
How in Jesus the fullness of God was hid;
How in Jesus God's grace and undying love,
Came into our world and came from above.

But I'm ahead of myself so let's go back to the start,
And you be the judge of the change in my heart.
You be the judge of what Jesus has done,
And, then, you can decide if he's really the One.

It all started, I guess, oh, three years ago now,
When a stranger on shore claimed that he knew how,
We could use our lives to catch people instead.
I thought, "The man's crazy! He's out of his head!"

In those days, you see, I fished for real fish.
And, in all the world, my grandest wish,
Was to make that catch that would break the nets,
So that I could brag and win all the bets.

And that's all that mattered - just filling my boat.
Filling it up so that I could gloat.
My needs, my wants, my feelings - all me!
That's all that mattered. That's all I could see.

But, then, I met Jesus and what a difference he made.
Oh, not right away! The old John didn't fade,
Away in a moment. It did take some time,
For me to catch on to the reason and rhyme,

Of his life in the world and his mission for God.
And, at first, I'll admit, it seemed a bit odd,
To care more for others and care less for me?
But as time went on I began to see,

That caring for others is what life's all about,
And that living for others, without a doubt,
Is the calling of God and the best calling yet.
And that's why he said, "Put down your net!"

"Put down your net and come follow me!
And I'll show you things that others don't see!
Put down your net and I'll show you how,
The world's going to change and change starting now!"

And show me he did. It's what his life was about,
As day after day he went in and out,
Of city and village and country and town,
With always a crowd gathered around,

To hang on his words and see what he'd do.
And hearsay it's not. I know that it's true.
I was there when the blind were given their sight.
I was there when their darkness was turned into light!

I was there as a lame man got up and walked!
I was there as a mute man opened and talked!
I was there as a leper was found to be well!
I was there as demons and devils fell!

I was there as the sick were given their health!
I was there as those without power or wealth,
Were given new lives and a whole new start.
I was there and it started to change my heart.

I was there and I saw it and I knew it was true.
And there were lots of things that I saw him do,
That boggled my mind and caused me to ask,
About my role in life and my earthly task.

Was I really put here just to fish for fish?
And, even if once my grandest wish,
Came true and it happened and I had it all,
Would that really fulfill God's heavenly call?

I struggled with that and, as time went by,
I was becoming convinced that the reason why,
I was given life was to follow his lead,
And do what he did and plant a seed,

Of hope and of joy and of things that could be,
In the lives of others so that they would see,

That life's more than fishing, more than working and sweat,
More than "having it all" or winning a bet.

And I was almost convinced that he was the One;
Almost convinced that, under the sun,
There was no one like him and none to compare,
Until, late one night, when I filled with despair.

"Could it be?" I wondered. "Did I hear them right?
Did they say he was 'guilty' in the dead of night?
Did they really say that they wanted him dead?
Was my hearing OK? Is that what they said?"

And he stood there mute! He didn't say a word!
And, if he had, I would have heard,
Because I was there, too, in the midst of that crowd.
I was there and I heard them screaming out loud:

"Crucify! Crucify! Let him hang on a tree!
Let him hang 'til he dies and then we'll see,
If his claims are true and if he's the One.
Crucify! Crucify! Let him hang 'til it's done."

And that's what they did. They led him away,
To a hill out of town. And I heard them say,
"If he is God, let him save himself now!
"Let the angels come down and wipe off his brow."

And he let it all happen. He let it all take place.
And I was there, too, with tears on my face,
As he hung on that tree and with his last breath,
Allowed them to win as they put him to death.

And for the next three days we sat and we stared,
At the walls and the ceilings and no one dared,
Utter a word about what we should do.
In a very real way, we had died, too.

We had died, too! We had given it all,
To follow this Jesus and answer his call.
We really had thought that he was the One,
That he was the Christ, God's only Son.

And all of our hopes and all of our dreams,
All of our plans and all of our schemes,
Died in those days and we didn't care.
And I remember it well because I was there.

But, then, on that Sunday, as I packed up to leave,
The women came back and I couldn't believe,
The story they told about a man at his tomb.
So Peter and I we ran from that room!

We ran from that room and rushed to his grave.
And I got there first but I wasn't too brave.
So I waited for Peter and when he arrived,
We entered together and the man said, "Alive!"

"He's alive! He's alive! He's no longer dead!"
Those were his words! That's what the man said!
But we couldn't believe it. How could it be?
He was dead, really dead, and I was there to see!

And, then, later that day in that room filled with fear,
In a moment that's now just as crystal clear,
As it was when it happened, our Jesus was there!
He came back from the dead and I didn't dare,

Question or wonder. I only believed.
In that moment of grace a new heart I received.
A heart full of power and wonder and peace,
A heart full of hope that will never cease.

And I'll never go back to just "fishing for fish."
How can I go back when now my wish,
Is for others to know the Jesus I know.
So I'm spending my life trying to show,

That he is what counts and he is what matters!
And that life is more than just climbing ladders;
More than winning and bragging and being the best;
More than hoarding and gloating and all of the rest!

Life is for giving! It's for giving away!
And that's the great thing you can learn on this day,
That life is for giving and that's what he's done!
And, because he did that, I know he's the One!

He's the One who brings joy and meaning to life!
He's the One who brings hope in the middle of strife!
He's the One who brings purpose with every new breath!
He's the One who brings life - life! - right out of death!

And that's the story that I've come here to share.
And I know that it's true because I was there.

And, because I was there, I have now come to you,
And if there's just one thing I would ask you to do,

It would be to listen again to that story this day.
Listen again and hear what I say:
This Jesus who told me to come follow him,
This Jesus who took away all of my sin,

This Jesus who healed and gave me new life,
Who brought joy out of sorrow and hope out of strife,
This Jesus who hung on that ugly, old tree,
Has now come to you ... like he once came to me.

So, give him a thought and give him an ear.
Let him into your life to take out the fear.
Let him into your life; let him into your heart,
And go on this day with a brand new start.

He's alive and he's here and he comes to you now,
And promises that he will show you how,
To fish for people and help them to see,
That he's alive right now! And always will be.

He's alive right now! And he's calling for you!
So give him a listen and see what he'll do.
Give him a listen and hear in his word,
The best news that you will ever have heard!

Amen.