

Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat.

Even if we know nothing about farming, we know that wheat grows as a nutritional kernel enclosed in chaff and has to be separated by being threshed (thrashed?) or put through a sieve while the chaff is blown away before the grain can be processed into bread.

Of course, Simon Peter and the other disciples were gathered for a Passover meal, congenial, wine served . . . the central festival of their people, when Jesus spoke those words. He had just a day or two earlier been welcomed by a large crowd – almost as though he were the awaited successor of old King David: Hosanna in the highest!

But the Gospels give evidence of a shortfall in his disciples' appreciation of Jesus. Sure, he had drawn them away from their prior occupations – including laborious fishing. They shared the glow of his popularity due to healings he performed and the creative way he spoke and taught. This Jesus was headed somewhere and they wanted to be there – hopefully in positions of honor, like heads of a Jesus bureaucracy, when the time came. And now Jesus has to spoil their fantasies with a warning: they are to be sifted, threshed, thrashed like wheat before the night is over! *Not I*, says Simon Peter, *if they take you they take me too*.

Please don't take it as profane if I illustrate (again) what then happened to Peter. It's a scene from the silent film *Steamboat Bill* starring Buster Keaton. To be exact, it's the scene where a powerful tornado strikes a river town. Keaton is shown standing with his back to the façade of a two story clapboard building. He is confused. And then without his noticing, the building's façade falls slowly forward upon Keaton – except: he is straddled by the open attic window. Saved, standing erect above the flattened façade. He turns; the whole interior of the house is exposed. He realizes what has happened and runs off.

To me that scene illustrates masterfully what happens when a conversion takes place – a real conversion. One's world falls apart or radically changes, one awakens to a new dimension. One's prior life takes on a vacancy – out of which – life and world take on a space, a meaning, an invitation to live more sensitively, curiously, responsive to whatever that Pentecostal wind was trying to say when it blew a world of facades away.

Simon Peter did, as Jesus predicted, decide at *first* to save his skin. But later he must have begun to ponder: what was it *really* that drew him toward this Jesus? The profundity of his words which Simon only took at face value? The slow fuse of his "touch" upon Simon's traditional all too standardized prejudices? The world as Jesus saw it – full of grace? Simon's later tears of remorse suggest he had at last arrived at the conviction that this Jesus was no less than a wellspring of Being unfathomable?

Conversion! Defined as being blown away – the interior, the inner Being of a world revealed when ultimately all facades are "gone with the wind".

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