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Japanese-English Translation: Katayama Hiroko—Jesus and Simon Peter (June 1953)

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While we've all heard stories about the lives and times of Jesus Christ and his disciples, such accounts as are recorded in the Bible circulate even unto the farthest reaches of the earth, so that every nation now claims its own legends of Our Lord and Savior and, say, Simon Peter or any of the other apostles. What follows, then, is an Irish folktale that tells as though the villages of that land were contiguous with those of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. And yet, contrary to popular belief, the Twelve Disciples were not Jesus' constant companions *en masse* as he traveled the plains and towns along the shores of the Sea of Galilee, so that the following is an account of one of his journeys through those regions with Simon Peter alone.

One day, as Jesus and Simon Peter climbed a bluff near the Sea of Galilee, they met an old beggar standing roadside in the light of the setting sun. Dressed in cap and garments tattered and soiled and starving to the point of tears, the beggar beseeched them for what they might spare as they made their way up the road. Peter had only a few coins on hand and, knowing this, Jesus decided not to intervene as he passed the two men but watched for his disciple's response to the beggar's entreaties. The old man trembled with hunger, and though deeply moved by the sight, Peter followed Jesus' lead and silently continued on his way.

As they returned by the same route the following day, Jesus and Simon Peter came upon a bandit who, though emaciated and scowling with pangs of hunger, stood armed with a sword sheathed and strapped to his back. Famished, he asked them if they hadn't a morsel to eat.

What an imbecile!, Peter thought. *As if we'd have food or anything to spare!*

Just then, Jesus miraculously produced a few coins and handed them to the man as they passed.

My Lord!, Peter protested. *Why is it that you offered nothing to the old beggar yesterday but have given money to this bandit today?! Being two, we'd have no reason to fear him, not to mention that I'm taller and also armed with a sword!*

O', Peter!, Jesus lamented. *How unfortunate it is that you see only what is apparent to you when, instead, you should look beyond appearances and see that which lies at the heart of things. The day is at hand when you will understand my actions of yesterday and today.*

Days passed, and as Jesus and Simon Peter traveled through the mountains, they happened to lose their way, at every turn finding themselves surrounded by rugged rockfaces and teetering on the edges of precipitous cliffs. They walked and walked, growing so hungry and thirsty that it seemed they might at any moment faint. Rain soon began to fall, lightning flashed, and Simon Peter stopped in his tracks as a man emerged and approached them from the bend ahead; it was the bandit they'd met the other day. Immediately recognizing Jesus and Peter and seeing their need of shelter from the storm, he showed them to the cave he called home. He then built a fire, presented them with bread and wine, and invited them freely to help themselves to all he owned, bidding them change into clean robes as he prepared pallets of fresh straw upon which they might rest while their rain-soaked garments dried by the fire.

Midday following, the bandit prepared lunch for Jesus and Simon Peter and saw them on their way, escorting them a fair distance and advising them on their route so that they'd not get lost again. So humbled was he by this man's hospitality that Peter thought him far saintlier than any saint he'd ever known, and he fell to thinking this over as they bid each other farewell and parted ways.

About an hour into their journey, Jesus and Simon Peter happened upon a man lying dead in the road, and with a closer look, they recognized him as the beggar of a few days past.

What a pity!, Peter mused. *He must have died of hunger and exposure to the cold. If only we'd given him food when he asked for it!*

Yes, but search his purse and see what's there, Jesus commanded. Peter did just this and found more than twenty silver and gold coins stashed in the bottom of the beggar's moneybag.

Aha!, he exclaimed. *This one was lying all along! Never again, My Lord, will I question you. Now, Peter, Jesus said, take the coins and throw them into the sea, far from shore so that no one will be able to retrieve them. For it is said, the love of money is the root of all manner of evil.*

Peter did as Jesus commanded him, gathering up the beggar's coins and trudging through the grassy fields toward the sea in order to toss them into the waters. But as he neared the shore, he again fell to thinking:

What a shame it would be, he mused, to throw away good money! We too are often hungry, and many are the nights when we must sleep in the cold. After all, money is money, so I'll just keep the pieces of gold and use them in the service of My Lord, who takes little thought of his own welfare and will be happy to have me look after him.

Pleased with himself, Peter tossed each of the silver coins far into the sea and returned straight-faced to the bluffs where Jesus stood leisurely surveying the scenic panorama. Catching sight of him as he arrived, Jesus asked Simon Peter if he had thrown away the coins as instructed.

Yes, Peter answered. I threw into the sea all but two or three of the gold coins, for so too is our purse nearly empty, and I thought we might find them useful. And yet, of course, if it be your wish that I should throw away these as well, then I shall go and do just that and return directly unto you.

O', Peter!, O', Peter!, Jesus again lamented. *You should have done exactly as I told you. How greedy you are, and surely in greed will you die.*

And so, it happened that Jesus' words came to pass, and Simon Peter spent the remainder of his life a greedy man. So too with the generations of his followers of whom it is said that, as was Simon Peter, many are consumed with the love of money.