

OMINOUS MUSIC OR SOUND EFFECTS TO SUGGEST THE ONGOING WAR.
THE TOWNSMAN IS SEATED AT A TABLE WITH A DRINK, AS IF IN A CAFE OR PUB.
LUKE APPROACHES THE TABLE.

LUKE

Good day to you.

TOWNSMAN

(rather cold)

Do I know you?

LUKE

I don't believe we've met. I was just trying to be friendly.

TOWNSMAN

Sorry, stranger - we don't do friendly here.
There's a war on, haven't you heard?

LUKE SITS DOWN AT THE TABLE.

LUKE

May I join you? I might be a stranger. But you know the saying, Remember to show hospitality to strangers, for you may be entertaining angels unaware...

TOWNSMAN

We get a lot of strangers here. I don't think many of them are angels. There are other sayings - walls have ears, keep yourself to yourself, careless talk costs lives, mind your own business.

LUKE

I'm not here on business.

TOWNSMAN

Is that a fact? What's in your bag, then?

LUKE

Medicines and supplies. I'm a doctor. But I'm journeying on behalf of a friend. He's in prison.

TOWNSMAN

(preparing to move away)

In prison? Sorry, I don't want to be seen talking with the friend of a jailbird. Here's another saying for you - a man is known by the company he keeps.

LUKE

Quite so. My friend is called Paul.

TOWNSMAN

(resumes his seat)

Paul? A common enough name. For a Roman.

LUKE

Ah, but my friend's a Jew. Saul of Tarsus, as was. But now he's known as Paul. He's in jail because he's a follower of the way.

TOWNSMAN

The way? You speak as if there were only one way. But nowadays, we hear about so many different ways. And what is your way, stranger? You're not a Jew.

LUKE

True, I'm a Gentile. I'm Greek, from near Philippi. My name is Luke. I'm a follower of the way, like Paul. This is the symbol we use. (Drawing on a slate.) Ichthus. The sign of the fish.

TOWNSMAN

(glances briefly at it and quickly
rubs it off)

Anyone can learn to draw a fish. Whatever way they follow.

LUKE

Ah, yes, I hadn't thought of that. I'm trying to help my friend Paul. He's in Caesarea and he's facing yet another trial for his life. We may be able to get him released, if I can gather enough information.

TOWNSMAN

Information? Ah, yes, everyone wants information. The Romans, the zealots, the splinter groups, the terrorists, the counter-terrorists. Some offer to pay for information. Some try and get it by posing as a friend. Some cut off your fingers to get you in the mood for telling secrets. Angels unaware? I don't think so.

LUKE

What do these people want to know?

TOWNSMAN

Everything. Anything. The last known whereabouts of certain persons, their descriptions, their associates, their plans, any maps, diagrams, documents, belongings.

LUKE

I see why you're cautious. But that is not the kind of information I seek. I'm trying to put together a definitive picture of the life of Jesus.

TOWNSMAN

Jesus? Another common name, in this part of the world. So you're collecting evidence - a dossier?

LUKE

I'm writing a confidential account. There are many stories about Jesus. But very little is written down - mostly, these stories are whispered by his followers in secret.

TOWNSMAN

If such things are secret, then why not let them remain secret?

LUKE

There's a Roman - who calls himself Theophilus. I think he may be sympathetic to the cause. He's heard conflicting accounts of this man Jesus - stories, rumours. He doesn't know what to believe.

TOWNSMAN

And why should he believe you?

LUKE

I'm a doctor. And I'm a Gentile. Among the Jews, there is such violent disagreement about Jesus. But as a Gentile, I stand outside all that - I'm, well, a critical friend. If I can put together an impartial account of Jesus for the Roman authorities, they might release my friend from prison.

TOWNSMAN

(very carefully)

Puts me in mind of another saying - the truth will set you free.

LUKE

Indeed.

TOWNSMAN

So this account you are writing - it could help to set Paul free? Your friend in prison?

LUKE

I believe it could. And I believe this truth could also set many more people free. It would be very good news.

TOWNSMAN

The Good News according to Luke.

LUKE

The Good News of Jesus. Don't you think the world should know the truth?

TOWNSMAN

I wonder, does the world really care about the truth? So - you're looking for people who know this man you speak about, Jesus?

LUKE

Ah, it would be wonderful to find people who know him. But sadly, he's dead.

TOWNSMAN

Is that a fact?

LUKE

What are you saying?

TOWNSMAN

(apparent digression)

I've heard about a doctor Luke. That he went on a journey with a preacher called Paul.

LUKE

Yes, I travelled with Paul from Troas to my home-town, Philippi.

TOWNSMAN

Troas to Philippi? If Luke had been on that journey with Paul, then he would have met Paul's fellow-traveller, Barnabas...

LUKE

Our fellow-traveller was called Silas.

TOWNSMAN

(quietly)

So you are Luke. And I am the brother of Cleopas. (SHAKES HANDS) Greetings, my friend. Sorry, but we have to be very careful - a lot of our people are in jail, like brother Paul. Some are in hiding. Others were not so fortunate.

LUKE

When I said Jesus is dead, you replied "Is that a fact?" What did you mean by that?

TOWNSMAN

I know he died. We saw him die. From a distance, I'm ashamed to say. We weren't brave enough to stand by him as he sagged on the cross, dying, naked, sweating blood. But Luke - Jesus is not dead, as you know.

LUKE

I know! That's exactly why I set out to write this account.

TOWNSMAN

We saw him again, afterwards. Jesus. He walked with us on the road to Emmaus. He joined us for supper. We didn't know - and then, when he broke the bread...

LUKE

Tell me more.

TOWNSMAN

Oh, I will, brother Luke. I'll tell you all I know. But I can do better than that. You want more eye-witness reports? Then come with me now, and let me introduce you to someone. She is old now, but she remembers everything, everything, for it is treasured up in her heart. Her name is Mary...