

Jesus the Sewer

(Matthew 9:16 – 'And no one puts a patch of unfinished cloth on an old torn garment, because the patch will weaken the garment and the tear will be made worse)

In Nazareth, the market square is the place where people come to shop for things they cannot make or grow for themselves.



Nathan's and my basket weaving workshop faces onto the square, with Joseph's carpenter's shop next door. Around the rest of the square there is Ezra the Mat maker and Joash the Potter. We all live in simple houses we have built ourselves, with help from our families and friends. The walls of the houses are made from mud bricks, just as our ancestors made generations ago for Pharaoh, in Egypt. Inside the houses we have just a single room, with a platform about 18 inches high covering one half. Our animals; sheep, goats, donkey and chickens live in the lower part of the house at night, so that we can watch over them and protect them. Around the walls are a few niches where we can burn rush lights, but mostly we go to bed when it is dark and get up when it is light. During the cold months the whole family sleep in the house on mats with just our cloaks pulled around us. In the summer we climb up onto the roof via the staircase on the side of the house, and sleep there under an awning, or just under the stars.

There are two houses on the market square which are built in stone. The biggest belongs to Marco the Merchant. His house is not only built of stone, but it has a wooden door with metal hinges and a metal bolt. Our door is wood with leather hinges and a wooden bar to keep it closed. Marco has his goods to protect, which he keeps in two wooden chests. Pretty materials and jewels from foreign lands. Exotic spices and herbs from the East and the money he makes from trading these things all across the length and breadth of the country.

The other stone house belongs to Simeon the Smith. His workshop is opposite that of Joseph, as the two of them collaborate on many items. The door of Marco's house was made by the two of them. Every plough that ploughs the land outside the village, which grows the crops we all feed on, was made by them. Every knife has a metal blade and a wooden handle, every spade that digs and every hoe that we use to weed between our crops is made by them.

Smithing is a magical art. Lumps of dark heavy stone are delivered to the back of Simeon's house. He heats it up until the rock itself melts then out pours molten metal. He heats and cools, hammers and shapes and makes for us perfectly crafted metal items. Sometimes lumps of special metals; gold and silver are delivered to him, and

he fashions bracelets with coloured stones he has picked up and shaped. His work is dangerous as well as clever. He gets burned by the sparks which fly from his fires and scorched by the heat of the flames – and he is the idol of all of the older boys in the village.

They love nothing better than to go and watch him work, and if they get to help man the bellows, or help build a fire to hold the crucible, then they are in seventh heaven. Jonathan was no exception. He did have more excuse than many, as his friend Jesus was often sent to help, when Joseph and Simeon were making something together. If I told him once, I told him a thousand times that if he was going to go into the workshop, he had to take off his simlāh, his heavy woolen over tunic and gird up his kethōneth into his belt, so that as little material as possible got holes burnt in it. Sometimes he remembered, mostly he didn't until he got hot, when he would take it off and throw it into a corner of the smithy where it would still get showered in sparks.

It got to a point that his simlah was almost more holes than material. I really needed to weave him a new one, but I didn't want to make a new one for it to rapidly look as holey as the old one. He was promised that if it didn't get any more holes in it for a month, I would start on a new one for him. For a while it seemed as if he had kept his promise, but then I noticed that there were parts of the simlah that I was never being allowed to see, so one day I just grabbed Jonathan and turned him around. I was delighted to see that there were apparently no new burn holes in the back. I was astonished to see a crudely placed patch of brilliantly coloured new material near the hem, that appeared to be barely hanging on to the surrounding material.

I turned Jonathan around and gave him my best mother-wants-to-know-all look. He managed to keep my eye defiantly for quite a while before a blush appeared and he dropped his eyes. I find silence works much better than words when you want a confession! It appeared that contrary to my instructions, Jonathan had gone to the forge in his simlah, and had as usual taken it off and thrown it into a dirty corner, where as usual a spark had burned a little hole in it. It appears that my threat not to make a new one if the current simlah appeared holey again, was now taken very seriously by Jonathan and Jesus, who was with him at the time. After a quick discussion Jesus took Jonathan home with him, and cut a piece out of his own new simlah, and having borrowed a needle and thread from Mary's needle case, he did his first bit of sewing, and patched Jonathan's simlah for him, but they hadn't really taken into account the differences in colour. After another hurried discussion, they headed to the village well, where they apparently tried to wash Jonathan's simlah, lots of times, to make the colour fade quickly. All they had managed to do was make the patch shrink in the wash and almost pull it off the original material. The only remaining thing Jonathan could think of doing was try and hide the whole sorry mess from me!

I had a great deal of difficulty in stopping myself from laughing. I would love to have

seen Jesus sewing the patch on. I would love to have seen Mary's face when she found the hole in Jesus' simlah. I would really like to have seen them washing the simlah over and over again, and then seen their faces as the material dried and the patch, still bright and shiny shrunk and almost pulled itself off the simlah, after all they had done.

Jonathan did get a new simlah, but in between the time I found out about the repair and when I finished the new one, I took the old one away from him. He was forced to go around in just his kethōneth. It is a garment which covers everything, but it is only the poor who go around without one, unless one is working doing manual labour when the simlah gets in the way. Jonathan found himself being pointed at and laughed at. It was a bitter lesson that he learned; that ones belongings need to be looked after properly. Mary turned a hem on Jesus simlah, so it was too short. He got laughed at as well. I think that neither of them will ever forget the lesson they have been taught by the problem of the patched simlah.