

Judas

Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:9-15; Luke 4:1-13

Year A Lent 1 ; Year B Lent 1 ; Year C Lent 1 ; Year C Epiphany 3 (Catholic)

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

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▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence	▲
▲	Andrew - the younger brother of Peter, one of the youngest disciples	▲
▲	Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor	▲
▲	Jesus	▲
▲	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus	▲
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲

Scene 1

Andrew , James , Jesus , Joanna , Judas , Phillip

{Judas enters the camp as Jesus and disciples are finishing a meal.}

Phillip *[joyfully]* Judas!

Andrew *[joyfully]* What brings you here? Have you changed your mind?

Judas I'm considering it.

Phillip *[to Jesus]* Rabbi, we have to persuade him this time! Judas is a great organizer!

Jesus Is he?

Joanna *[to Judas]* I've heard of you. You were John's point man, weren't you?

Judas I was indeed.

Joanna I'm sorry for your loss. He was a remarkable man. *[to Jesus]* Rabbi, he's a really good organizer, from what I've heard.

James *[argumentatively]* Who says we need an organizer or "point man" at all? We've been doing just fine the way we are. Now if he wants to join up, we should welcome him, but he should start at the bottom.

Phillip You mean like me and Nathanael?

Andrew That's absurd! He has more experience leading groups than all of us put together.

Judas *[hastily diffusing the tension]* I just want to say that if I were to join - *if* I were to join - I'd have no demands or expectations about the position I'd be given. I'd be happy to help in whatever ways I could.

Jesus But you do have some kind of requirement. Since you said, "if".

Judas I just want an answer to one simple question.

Joanna *[under her breath]* That might be harder than you think!

James What's the question?

Judas *[to Jesus]* Are you the Messiah?

{A long pause.}

James *[confidently]* Go on, rabbi. Tell him!

Jesus It depends.

James What?

Jesus It depends on what he means by "messiah".

Joanna Ha! A good answer.

Phillip But Judas, you're the one who told us to follow the rabbi, because you thought that's exactly what he was.

Andrew Actually, he told us he *might* be the Messiah.

Judas Actually, I told you *our former master* thought he was the Messiah.

Joanna Really?

Judas He said outright that he himself was not the Messiah, but that your rabbi was. He said that when he baptized him, the sky opened and a voice from Heaven called him the Son of God.

Joanna Did you see it happen? Did you hear the voice?

Judas No.

Phillip Neither did we. But we were busy managing the crowd.

Joanna *[to Jesus]* Did *you* see it?

Jesus I saw many things. *[to Judas]* But I still don't know what *you* mean by "messiah".

Judas What everybody means! The One who will lead us to freedom. The One who will restore the nation. Is that you?

Jesus *[after a pause, beginning a talk in a storytelling voice as if ignoring the question]* After my baptism, I was driven into the desert where I wandered for 40 days.

Andrew I remember that. Judas had instructed us to find you and follow you, but when we caught up with the group, you had gone, they had no idea where.

Phillip We figured, "okay, we'll have a wait a day or two for him to return," but the days - and then the weeks - went by, and: nothing!

James *[to Jesus]* We knew you'd be back, though. Even though *some* people had their doubts.

Joanna *[to Jesus]* You were baptized?

Jesus *[gravely]* I was.

Joanna But - why?

Jesus It was...necessary.

Judas *[thoughtfully]* I think I understand. But what I don't understand is "driven". Who - or what - drove you into the desert?

Jesus The Holy Spirit.

Phillip *[in awe]* Wow.

Andrew What did it feel like?

Phillip I wish we could all be led by the Spirit, every day!

Jesus *[quietly]* If you knew what it felt like, or what it might lead to, you wouldn't wish for it so fervently.

James Of course we would! We wouldn't let anything stand between us and God.

Judas Sometimes, John would run out into the desert in the pitch black of the night and just wail for hours. It was terrifying. It was like he was crying out against the burden of his Call, trying to *escape* the Spirit.

Jesus I didn't get to that point, but yes, it was difficult. No companionship, no food, and very little sleep.

Joanna No food? Is this when you learned the fasting techniques that you later taught us?

Jesus That was the occasion, yes.

Phillip They worked pretty good, but we only had to use them for a few days at the most. I can't imagine keeping the hunger at bay for 40 days!

James That's because you're not the rabbi. I'll bet he could have gone a hundred days without feeling so much as a stomach growl!

Jesus Actually, I lasted about 30 before the hunger overtook me. And then I went on for ten more days, ravenously hungry and half out of my mind.

Judas *[thoughtfully]* That's the kind of admission I'm not sure my former master could ever have made.

Joanna Or most men.

Andrew Still, ten days beyond the point where the meditation stopped helping is pretty amazing.

Jesus I'm just glad that's when it ended. I was afraid I'd have to go on for 40 more days in that state.

Judas So you didn't decide on your own to return at that point?

Jesus No, I was being led by the Spirit. But at that point, a thing happened that was the thing I'd been led out there to experience. And afterward, I was free to return.

James What was the thing that happened?

Joanna You mean you don't know? None of you?

Andrew He never told us.

Phillip I've always been afraid to ask!

Judas Well, I guess we can all find out together now.

Jesus What happened was this: I was put through three temptings by Satan.

{A long incredulous pause.}

Joanna *[skeptically]* Satan? The Devil?

Phillip Awesome!

Judas When you say "Satan" are you speaking literally? Like, there was some kind of being or person there talking to you?

Andrew Was it a voice you heard? Or was it just that you were tempted to do certain things?

Jesus I'm not sure how to answer your questions. In any case, the first test was this: he said that if I were really the Messiah, I could turn stone to bread to relieve my hunger.

Joanna Is that even true? Is there some prophecy or doctrine from the scriptures that says the Messiah will have this power?

Jesus Not that I know of. Nevertheless, I answered him with scripture: Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Judas Uh, I don't quite follow your logic. Surely, that scripture doesn't mean we can't also have bread. All it says is that food is not the most important thing.

Joanna Where does that scripture come from?

Jesus The books of Moses. They describe the people of Israel on their journey home from Egypt.

James They wandered 40 *years* in the wilderness! 40 years, 40 days!

Phillip And they were hungry, too, a lot of the time!

Andrew I remember the exact passage. Their hunger was meant to teach them to trust God.

Judas I see. So the point was that your hunger wasn't some random occurrence, but had a purpose behind it, and it would have been wrong for you to thwart that purpose.

Jesus Exactly.

Judas That shows good discipline. The ability to keep your eyes focused firmly on the prize.

Jesus A necessary quality for a messiah?

Phillip So what was the next test?

Jesus He brought me up to the pinnacle of the Temple and said that if I were really the Messiah, I should be able to throw myself off and not be injured.

Joanna Is that one also just a random claim, or is there scripture backing it up this time?

Judas It rings a bell, but it can't be right. That's the 91st Psalm, isn't it?

Andrew Yeah, that's it. We recited it just a few weeks ago at a synagogue the rabbi spoke at.

Phillip Wasn't that psalm about anybody who puts their faith in God?

James So? If it's anybody, then that includes the Messiah.

Joanna Yes, but...I don't know, it just seems a little...off to stretch it like that.

Judas It seems the devil doesn't know his scriptures as well as you'd think he would.

James *[argumentatively]* Maybe the devil was purposely confusing the issue, in order to trap the rabbi!

Jesus Maybe. In any case, I answered with scripture as well: You will not put the Lord your God to the test!

Andrew It seems like kind of an all purpose reply. You could have just said that to every temptation!

Jesus *[supportively]* That's true!

Joanna *[in concerned tones]* But wait a minute. What's the exact scripture? Isn't it also Moses? From the same section as the statement about bread, I think.

James *[defensively]* Why does it matter?

Judas *[continuing Joanna's analytical tone]* Yes. It's from a little later on, when the people are being urged to be righteous.

James *[increasingly belligerent]* And what's wrong with that?

Phillip James, take it easy! Why are you so upset?

James *[angrily]* Because this guy just walks in out of nowhere expecting to be made the boss of us, and now he's questioning everything the rabbi says.

Jesus It's all right, James. I welcome their questions.

Judas Good! Then here's my current one: the scripture in question read, I believe, "Do not test the Lord your God like you did at Massah." Is that right?

Jesus That's the one.

Judas Well, so it seems to me like this was a bit of an "off" quote as well.

James *[angrily]* See? There he goes!

Andrew Hold on, James. I think I see his point in this case. In the story from the scriptures, the "testing" is more like "testing God's patience" by not having faith in Him. That's not quite the same as testing someone by directly trying one of their promises.

- Phillip** I have no idea what either of you are talking about. Could someone tell me exactly what happened at Massah?
- Joanna** There was no water at Massah, and the people complained to Moses. "Why did you lead us out of Egypt only to let us die in the desert?"
- Phillip** Oh yeah! So God had Moses strike a stone, and water came out.
- Jesus** That's the story.
- James** *[triumphantly]* And what it's about is the people's lack of faith, just like it would have been a lack of faith for the rabbi to test God's protection by jumping off the pinnacle of the Temple!
- Joanna** Well, no, it's *not* the same. If anything, it's the opposite. You've got to have faith to jump. No one without faith is going to jump and kill himself just to prove a point!
- Judas** Yeah. The way for you to have failed the test the same way the people of Israel did at Massah would be to give up hope and prepare yourself to die of hunger. Or to refuse to go out to the desert in the first place because you didn't believe God would sustain you. And the way for the Massah story to fit your actual situation better would have been for the people to demand that Moses produce water for them before it was really needed, just to confirm that God would really provide it in a pinch. Or for Moses himself to do it out of pride, to show he could do it.
- James** *[at the end of his patience]* Now he's wanting to rewrite the scriptures! *[to Judas]* If you have so many problems with the rabbi's teachings, why do you even want to join him?
- Judas** *[quietly]* I'm not sure I do - yet.
- Phillip** Judas, you have to! Rabbi, he's really not this critical. He never questioned the teaching of our old master. And he really is a great organizer!
- Andrew** He has tons of contacts in all kinds of places. Other dissident groups, government officials, religious organizations, you name it. He'd be an invaluable resource to us!
- Jesus** *[innocently]* I'm happy to have him. The only question is whether he's willing to join us.
- Judas** Let's hear the third temptation, and we'll see.

Jesus Okay. The third temptation was the easiest. He took me up into a high place and showed me all the kingdoms of the world, and said he would give them all to me if I would only bow down and worship him.

Phillip The easiest? It sounds more like the hardest!

James No way! It was the easiest! You can't go bowing down to Satan no matter what!

Joanna That's an odd thing to offer. To make the offer implies you can fulfill it. Could even the devil really give anyone all the kingdoms of the world? Are they really his to give?

Andrew And if so, would that include Israel?

Judas That's what should have made the offer really tempting: to accept it would be to achieve your mission just like that. You would have been ruler of not only Israel, but Rome. And at what cost? What does it even mean to "bow down to Satan"? At the cost of a purely symbolic gesture, Israel would be free. Wasn't that tempting?

Jesus Oh, well, when I said "easy", I only meant the answer I quoted him from scripture. Can anybody guess what it was?

Phillip The first two commandments! The Lord is God. Don't worship any others.

Jesus Very good!

Phillip So what do you think, Judas? Are you going to join us?

Judas I will if he'll answer one more question.

James God! Always another question!

Joanna The rabbi *values* questions!

Andrew More than the answers sometimes!

Jesus I don't know about that! But please, ask your question.

Judas *[after a momentous pause]* Are you the Messiah?

Jesus *[with intensity, after a pause of his own]* Follow me! And I promise you'll have your answer.

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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Freeman Ng is a writer, poet, and Google software engineer living in Oakland, California. He's also the author of:

- *Joan* - a novelization of the life of Joan of Arc
- *Who Am I?* - a personalizable picture book
- **Haiku Diem** - a daily haiku feed that's been going since July, 2010

www.AuthorFreeman.com