

# The Bread of Life (4)



*John 6:56-70*  
*Year B Proper 16*

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## Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3	4
▲	<b>Judas</b> - 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	▲		▲	
▲	<b>James</b> - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲			
●	<b>John</b> - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲			
■	<b>Joanna</b> - 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		■		●
▲	<b>Susanna</b> - the more conventionally-minded friend of Joanna, who, like her friend, left her home to become a disciple		▲		●
▲	<b>Disciple 1</b> - one of Jesus' disciples		▲		
▲	<b>Disciple 2</b> - one of Jesus' disciples		▲		
▲	<b>Jesus</b>			▲	
●	<b>Nathanael</b> - Phillip's crass bully of an older brother, who joins Jesus in search of redemption and nobler life			●	
●	<b>Peter</b> - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room			●	
●	<b>Thomas</b> - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts				▲
●	<b>Mary Magdalene</b> - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past				●

## Scene 1

**James , John , Judas**

*{Some of the disciples talk after Jesus' second sermon at the synagogue at Capernaum.}*

**Judas**    *[distraught]* I can't believe it.

**James**    *[accusingly to John]* Didn't you talk to him?

**John** I did. Last night and again this morning.

**James** *[accusingly]* What did you tell him? What did he say?

**John** I just asked him what he planned to speak on today, and he...didn't really give me an answer.

**Judas** *[bitterly]* As usual.

**James** *[to John]* You should have pressed him for an answer. You should have told us when you didn't get one!

**John** Sorry. It just didn't seem to me like...was today really such a disaster?

**James** *[apoplectically]* Are you crazy? Are you completely nuts? Yesterday, he gives a weird half baked sermon that confuses everybody it doesn't outrage, and today, given a chance to explain it or walk it back or even just forget about it and move on to something else, what does he do? HE PREACHES THE EXACT SAME SERMON!

**John** *[tentatively]* If it's what he had to say...

**Judas** *[calmly]* If that's what he had to say, then what does that say about our mission? Is the rabbi here to deliver the nation or found a new religion?

**John** Matthew thinks it has to be both.

**James** Matthew is an idiot!

**Judas** *[still calmly]* I get that there probably needs to be a spiritual dimension to all that we do, but that has nothing to do with the rabbi's self-aggrandizing mumble-jumble today.

**John** Well, he *is* the Messiah.

**Judas** We don't know that for sure. He hasn't claimed it explicitly.

**James** I'm sick of these debates! What are we doing to do next?

**Judas** Pack up and move on to the next stop, I guess.

**John** Did they definitely cancel our engagement?

**Judas** Definitely. Not that they said much. After going out on a limb to let us preach one more time, they were in no mood to even discuss it. The synagogue leader just handed me our cut and walked away.

**James** *[defiantly]* Let them walk away! Some day, they'll all be begging for a seat at the table, and *we'll* be the ones turning people away.

**Judas** *[grimly]* Not at this rate.

## Scene 2

Disciple1 , Disciple2 , Joanna , Susanna

*{Meanwhile, another group of disciples discusses the situation.}*

**Joanna** *[in distress]* Susanna, no!

**Susanna** I'm sorry, but I just can't stick it out any longer. It's been hard enough with the camping out and constant travel and not always having money for food. There were people talking about stoning us today!

**Joanna** I know, but they were just random people. The synagogue leader actually stood behind us as long as he reasonably could.

**Susanna** And then even he had to give us up! What does that tell you?

*{Two more disciples enter.}*

**Disciple1** *[to Susanna]* Did you tell her?

**Susanna** Yes.

**Disciple2** We're leaving, too.

**Joanna** Oh dear.

**Disciple1** It's not that I'm afraid of the crowd. I was with him when they tried to stone him at that village, remember? I stood by him then.

**Joanna** I understand. No one doubts your courage. But then why are you leaving?

**Disciple1** I don't know what I'm standing *for* any more. I'm willing to fight and die for the liberation of Israel, but is that what *he's* fighting for? It doesn't sound like it.

**Disciple2** I don't even know where all this talk about fighting came from! I didn't join for that! I heard he was a great teacher, and that's why I'm here, and he's said some good things, but mostly, I just don't understand what he's saying, and today was just weird.

**Susanna** Joanna, you'll come with me, too, won't you? I'm sure that if Chuza heard about what happened today, he'd want you to come home.

**Joanna** I don't know. I go back and forth all the time.

**Disciple1** You're the one who discovered him, aren't you?

**Joanna** Me? No, no. He already had a strong following when I joined him. Or at least, he had the same core group of disciples. We've added quite a few since those days. Including you two. I'm sorry we'll be losing you.

**Disciple2** So you'll be staying?

**Joanna** Like I said, I go back and forth. But right now, I'm here.

**Susanna** *[with disappointment]* Oh! I wish you'd come with me.

**Joanna** Are you sorry I dragged you into this?

**Susanna** *[after a pause for thought]* No. No, I'm glad I could be a part of it in this way, for a while at least. And I'll keep supporting him - as long as you do. When you stop your donations, then I will too.

**Disciple1** You not only follow him, but give him money?

**Susanna** A little. Joanna gives quite a bit more.

**Disciple1** *[to Joanna]* May I ask you why?

**Joanna** *[wryly]* Why do I donate money, and even follow him personally, when I'm not even sure who and what he is? *[with a sigh]* It's a long story. But the bottom line is that I follow him because Mary follows him.

**Disciple1** *[incredulously]* Mary Magdalene?

**Joanna** Yup.

**Disciple2** I didn't even know she was legitimate follower! I thought she was more of a...well, a "camp follower", if you know what I mean.

**Susanna** That's what she used to be, but she's reformed.

**Disciple1** *[to Joanna]* And the two of you, you were friends even before she...reformed?

**Joanna** No. We didn't know each other at all until the day we both joined the rabbi.

**Disciple2** But you said she was the one who got you to join the rabbi.

**Joanna** I said that I'll follow him as long as she does. But yes, she was also the one who drew me in.

**Disciple1** Based on knowing her for less than a day?

**Susanna** You have to realize, it was a pretty amazing day.

**Disciple2** Wow. This whole group is nuts! *[to Joanna]* No offense intended.

**Disciple1** *[to the other disciple]* You know who she is, don't you?

**Disciple2** I do. *[to Joanna]* And sorry, I really meant no offense. It's just so bizarre! A "reformed" ...woman, and the steward of Herod's house, both of them following this rabbi who talks in riddles.

**Disciple1** *[to Joanna]* So, you don't really know what he's about or why you're following him?

**Joanna** Not entirely, no. All I can tell you is that I first met him because I thought he might be an interesting speaker and invited him to address a little group Susanna and I were part of. And that day, I heard him speak and saw him act in ways that were so much...bigger than my world that I had to follow Mary into his, to see what was there. To see if there was really a "there" there!

**Disciple1** And you haven't come to a conclusion yet.

**Joanna** No. But I don't blame anyone for giving up on the search. It's been very frustrating for me, too. In fact, if you're at worried about getting pushback when you tell them you're quitting, I'll be happy to come support you.

**Susanna** *[reluctantly]* Actually...I wasn't planning on talking to anyone else but you. I get so intimidated by those men. Could you just let them know after I've gone?

**Joanna** Of course.

**Disciple1** Us, too. We weren't planning to tell anyone, either, but Susanna assured us we could trust you.

**Joanna** Certainly, but why are you reluctant to tell them yourself?

**Disciple1** Frankly, we're a little afraid.

**Joanna** Of what?

**Disciple2** Of what the rabbi or his inner circle might do when they hear we're leaving.

**Joanna** Well, I'll admit that James can be a hothead, but as for the others...

**Disciple1** *[interrupting in a serious tone]* It's actually the rabbi himself we're most worried about. I wouldn't have thought this of him in the past, but these last couple of days, he's been sounding like one of those...what do call them?

**Disciple2** Cult leaders? Megalomaniacs? *[to Joanna]* No offense!

**Joanna** *[sadly]* No, none taken. I can't say you're wrong.

**Disciple1** And you never know what one of those guys will do if you threaten to leave them.

**Susanna** *[to Joanna]* Are you sure you won't come, too?

**Joanna** No, for good or bad, I'm committed. There's something here. There's something in him bigger than the world. I only see glimpses of it from time to time, but Mary seems to be completely locked in on it. I trust her, and I trust my own small glimpses. I'm going to stay.

### Scene 3

Jesus , Judas , Nathanael , Peter

*{Jesus calls all the disciples together for a meeting.}*

**Jesus** *[sternly]* I've asked you to gather here because I hear that some have left us, and many more are planning to. Is this true?

**Judas** About a dozen have left.

**Nathanael** *[pointedly]* So far.

**Jesus** Are you thinking of leaving, too?

**Nathanael** *[pugnaciously]* Maybe.

**Peter**            *[censoriously to Nathanael]* Dude! *[to Jesus]* It's only been newbies and wimps so far.

**Judas**            *[urgently]* It's because of your sermon today. And yesterday. A lot of people - not just the "newbies" - had problems with it.

**Jesus**            Because I told them about the bread of life that comes down from heaven, which, if they eat of it, they will live forever?

**Nathanael**       *[accusingly]* Because you said that *you* were this bread!

**Peter**            I gotta admit: that was hard to understand.

**Judas**            And you didn't explain it, and when they let you preach another sermon, you just said the same thing over again.

**Jesus**            And they were offended by this. *[raising his voice to address the whole group again]* If any of you are also offended, how will you react when you see the Son of Man ascending back into Heaven?

**Nathanael**       What? This is exactly what we're talking about!

**Jesus**            The Spirit gives life. The flesh counts for nothing. My words are full of the Spirit and life. Yet, there are some of you who don't believe them. That - if you want explanations - is why I told you before that no one comes to me unless the Father has enabled him.

*{The group starts murmuring and more disciples walk away from the gathering.}*

**Peter**            *[sharply to those who are leaving]* Hey! Come back! Where are you going?

**Nathanael**       I can't believe it! He's just throwing oil on the fire!

**Jesus**            *[to Nathanael]* Will you leave, too, then?

**Nathanael**       *[glumly after a pause]* I'm no quitter!

**Jesus**            Good! And what about you, Peter?

**Peter**            *[cheerfully]* Are you kidding? I'd stick by you if everyone else left. Where else would I go? You're the bread of life!

**Jesus**            *[with a laugh]* Very good! And what about you, Judas? Are you getting tired of trying to control the whirlwind?

**Judas**      *[discombobulated by Jesus knowing that that's how he talks about him]* What? Uh. *[carefully]* Ah, I guess they've told you I call you a force of nature. It's not an insult.

**Jesus**      Nor do I take it as one.

**Judas**      Then I guess I'll stay and continue riding it out.

**Jesus**      Good! Because I need you. *[to the whole group]* I have chosen you all, and the Father has sent you to me. And yet: one of you is a devil!

#### Scene 4

Joanna , Mary , Susanna , Thomas

*{Late that night, Joanna, Mary, and Thomas sit by the fire.}*

**Joanna**      So you decided to stay, too.

**Thomas**      *[whimsically]* There was never any doubt.

**Mary**      I'm glad!

**Thomas**      Thanks. I like you, too.

**Joanna**      May I ask why you're staying? Was there really no doubt?

**Thomas**      There was no doubt about you, the group. I like you. I've joined myself to you. I'll die with you if it comes to that.

**Mary**      What about him?

**Thomas**      There were no doubts about him because there are no beliefs about him - yet. Nothing that happened today had any effect on me, except to make me more interested in sticking around to see more.

*{Susanna enters.}*

**Susanna**      Is there any room around that fire for me?

**Joanna**      Susanna! What are you doing here?

**Susanna**      I've come back.

**Joanna**      For real? You mean, to stay?



**Susanna** For a little while longer, anyway.

**Joanna** That's wonderful! But are you sure?

**Susanna** *[firmly and proudly]* No. No, I am not!

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*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at  
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