

Love



*Matthew 5:38-48; Luke
6:29-42*
*Year A Epiphany 7; Year C
Epiphany 7*

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3	4	5	6
▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence	▲	▲	▲			
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲	▲			●	
▲	Thomas - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts	●	▲		▲		
●	Mary Magdalene - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past	▲			●		
▲	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	▲	▲		▲		
▲	Jesus		■			●	▲
▲	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			▲			

Scene 1

Joanna , John , Mary , Phillip , Thomas

{A contingent of disciples is about to confront Jesus about some extreme teachings about anger, lust, and divorce he recently gave them.}

Phillip Are you sure we should be doing this? What if he gets mad at us?

John I'm sure he won't. He's just not that kind of man.

Thomas *[glumly]* But if he is, it's probably best to find out sooner than later, anyway.

Mary *[under her breath]* Hmmpphhh!

Phillip *[to Mary]* Did you say something?

{A pause while Mary says nothing.}

Joanna Go on, Mary, speak up. We're all friends here.

Mary *[summoning her courage and blurting this out to everybody]* I think it's wrong of you to suspect the rabbi of any hardness. He can't have said the things you say he did! He's a great man, a wonderful man.

Thomas I hope you're right.

Mary I *know* I'm right!

John For what it's worth, I agree with you. But *because* I'm so sure, I also don't think it can possibly hurt to ask him about some of the things he said. He'll welcome our questions.

Phillip All I can say is, we never dared to question our former master about anything! He was scary. Judas was really the only one of us who talked to him about anything big on a regular basis.

Joanna Speaking of which, where is he? He was the one who raised this whole issue in the first place.

John I spoke with him. He doesn't believe direct talk like this can shed any light on the question. He said if we went away satisfied, it might just be because the rabbi is a good actor, and if we went away still unhappy, it might just mean we miscommunicated.

Thomas And you call *me* the Doubter!

Mary *[to Joanna]* Do we have to be a part of this?

Joanna *[to Mary]* Well, I think we need to clear this up. I don't know if I'd be able to rest easy here if I didn't.

Mary *[to Joanna, scandalized]* You doubt Him, too?

Joanna *[kindly and carefully]* You have to remember: I don't know him as well as you do - yet. But I hope to, and then perhaps all will be well.

Phillip There he is.

John Okay, is everybody ready?

Mary *[hopelessly to herself]* This is wrong. This is just wrong!

Scene 2

Jesus , Joanna , John , Phillip , Thomas

{They come to Jesus.}

Jesus Did you want to talk about something?

John Yes, if that's okay. We want to ask you about some things you've said to different people this week.

Jesus Of course. What things?

John One of them was what you told Phillip about anger being as bad as murder.

Jesus Ah, yes. What else?

Joanna Well, then there was our talk about divorce and vows.

Jesus Okay. Anything else?

Thomas What you told Peter about lust being as bad as adultery.

Jesus Perfect! I'd love to talk about these things. I've been thinking about them a lot, and will probably turn it all into a sermon.

Phillip *[nervously]* A sermon? About all those things?

Jesus Yes indeed! The title will be "You have heard it said," and the theme will be the enormous gulf between the conventional wisdom of the world - and even of religion - even at their best, and the new gospel of the Kingdom. For example, what does the law of Moses say should be done to someone who harms another person?

Thomas The punishment should equal the crime. "An eye for an eye," right?

Jesus Correct. Now how do you think that might change under the Kingdom?

John I suppose mercy would enter in. Forgiveness.

Joanna In every case? I'm not so sure that's a good idea. Sometimes, you *need* the law.

Phillip My parents always forgave my brother for beating me up, and that only made him to beat me up more!

Jesus Then you won't like what I'm about to say. You have heard it said by the law, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," and you have heard it said by the merciful, "Forgive," but *I* say to you: If anyone strikes you on one cheek, don't just forgive him, but offer him the other cheek as well, and if anyone sues you for your coat, give him your cloak as well, and if anyone forces you to march one mile, go a second mile as well. Give to everyone who begs from you, and don't refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. *Then* you'll be living the Kingdom.

{A long pause while they digest this new teaching.}

Joanna *[awkwardly trying to phrase her objection]* Rabbi? Do you mean...do you feel...your first instruction, for example: is it that you think it'll reduce violence in the world if we don't "hit back" as it were? (personally or through the law?) Do you think it's the hitting back that begets more violence?

Jesus I have no idea.

Phillip I know one thing for sure: If I ever offered the other cheek to Nathanael, he'd happily hit it, too! And then punch me in the stomach. And then knock me on the head.

Jesus I don't doubt it!

Phillip Then how is this good advice?

Thomas It doesn't even help Nathanael! It only makes him worse.

John Maybe he'd learn by Phillip's example. Maybe Phillip's love for him would eventually overcome Nathanael's hate.

Joanna That might be true of Nathanael, or this man or that, but there are many men out there - probably most men - that it wouldn't stop at all. *[to Jesus]* But that's not what you're really saying, anyway, is it?

Jesus No.

Thomas Then that part about always giving to beggars and borrowers: it's not because you're under the impression that people who ask you for money are always in genuine need, and will spend it wisely?

Jesus I'm no fool.

Phillip But you're telling us to give away our money - and even our possessions - to anyone who asks.

Jesus Yes.

{A long silence while they all ponder this.}

John What you said about marching a second mile: are you talking about the Roman law that allows their soldiers to force people to carry their gear for them for up to a mile?

Jesus Among other things, yes.

John Does that mean we're not supposed to resist the Roman occupation?

Jesus It's the conventional wisdom of this world that you should hate your enemies and fight back against your oppressors, but what do you think the Kingdom calls you to?

Phillip Peace?

Jesus That's a good start.

Thomas But you're not just talking about seeking peace when possible, right? You're talking about non-resistance no matter what. If someone hits you, you let him hit you again. If the a Roman soldier forces you to carry his gear for a mile, you volunteer for a second mile as well.

Phillip Wow. Judas is not going to like hearing that!

Jesus Then he's going to hate *this*. You have heard it said by the world's wisdom that you should fight back against your enemies, and you have heard it said by the peacemakers of the world that you should submit to your enemies. What I say to you...is that you should *love* them!

{Everybody reacts at once.}

John What?

Thomas That's crazy!

Joanna You can't be serious.

Phillip Judas is going to flip!

Jesus What's so admirable about loving those who love you, or lending to those from whom you expect repayment? Even tax collectors do that. Where's the great virtue in loving those whom you're supposed to love? Even the Gentiles do that. But if you love those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you, then you'll be acting like your Father in heaven, who causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall for both the good and the wicked. Strive to be as perfect in love as He is.

Scene 3

Judas , Phillip

{Phillip reports to Judas.}

Judas So you guys really went to the rabbi with our concerns?

Phillip Yup.

Judas And did you achieve any satisfaction?

Phillip No, not at all.

Judas I thought that's how it would turn out. Straight answers are a tough get from men like that.

Phillip "Men like that"? How can you be so down on someone you're following as the Messiah?

Judas Down? Who says I'm down on him? Great men like him, and like John before him, are forces of nature. You don't ask the storm to explain itself. You only judge as best you can whether you can harness its force for good. If you can, you go for it. If you can't, you get the hell out of its way and hope it doesn't do much damage in passing.

Phillip How do we decide which choice to make this time?

Judas It's easy. It all boils down to his attitude to the occupation. If he'll lead the fight against the Romans, I'll give my life to serve him. If he won't, then I'm out of here.

Phillip *[suddenly alarmed by the memory of Jesus apparently supporting the occupation]* The Romans? It all depends on how he feels about the Romans?

Judas Yes. *[suddenly hearing something in Phillip's voice]* Did he say something about them?

Phillip *[awkwardly trying to avoid telling the bad news]* No! I mean, uh, I'm not sure. I don't remember it all.

Judas But you obviously remember *something*! Come on, what is it?

Phillip *[trying to think of something else to offer]* Um...uh, yes he did say...he said...*[realizing there's something he can say]* Oh! Yes: he was talking about how we should love - uh...everybody, and then he said that loving people who already loved you was no big deal, because even tax collectors and Gentiles did that.

Judas Ah. Okay, well that *is* encouraging. He's singling out Roman collaborators as the lowest of the low, and assuming that non-Israelis are inherently inferior. Attitudes that, if you were looking only for an enlightened moral teacher, might raise some qualms requiring "straight answers". But the important thing to us is that it indicates the storm is moving in the right direction!

Scene 4

Joanna , Mary , Thomas

{Thomas, Joanna, and Mary talk things over.}

Joanna So what did you think?

Thomas I'm pretty stunned.

Joanna Same here.

Thomas *[to Mary]* How about you?

Mary It's going to be hard, but it was always hard. I'll try my best.

Joanna Try your best to do what?

Mary Obey his commands.

Joanna But Mary, I don't believe you should *have* to try. The commands are unreasonable. If every follower of the rabbi obeyed them to the letter...well, he wouldn't have any more followers soon, because we'd all be starved to death or murdered!

Thomas [*genuinely curious*] So you're not going to try following those rules?

Joanna I think I might leave instead.

Mary No! Joanna, no! You can't!

Joanna I'm sorry, Mary, but this just isn't working out for me. I just can't continue following someone who says the extreme things he does.

Thomas Why don't you just do what I plan to do?

Joanna What's that?

Thomas Ignore them.

Joanna What, just ignore all the problematic sayings?

Thomas Sure, why not?

Joanna [*almost lighthearted over the absurdity of it all*] But...how can you do that? If you believe in somebody, you can't just ignore any evidence that goes against those beliefs.

Thomas But the thing is, I *don't* believe in him. Or at least, I have no certainty about anything the others believe about him.

Mary [*genuinely curious*] Then why are you here?

Thomas I...just want to be. That's the one thing I'm sure of. I want to be with all of you. And with him, too. You're my friends now, my family. I don't know what he is or what the group will become. I just know I want to be part of it. I suppose if everybody left him, then I'd leave too. But until then, I'm in. [*shyly after a pause*] I guess that's why I'd hate it if you left.

Mary Me, too! Please stay!

Joanna Thanks. Both of you. I'll think it over.

Scene 5

Jesus , John

{John returns to talk more with Jesus.}

John *[in moral anguish]* Rabbi, I have to leave you.

Jesus Leave me? Why?

John I can't obey them. I can't follow your commands.

Jesus If you have further objections to them, we should talk some more.

John *[miserably]* It's not that. It's not that I have objections. I *want* to obey them, but I just know I'll fail. I'll fail you. I'm not worthy to be your follower.

Jesus *[compassionately]* Oh, John. Refrain from condemnation, and you won't be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you: A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over!

Scene 6

Jesus

{The next day, Jesus preaches to his disciples, who are all still with him.}

Jesus Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own? Hypocrite! First take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. With what measure you use, it will be measured to you. Treat others the way you'd like to be treated by them. The student is not above the teacher - can the blind lead the blind without leading them both into a pit? - but everyone who is fully trained will become like their teacher. *[after a pause]* Let all who hear my words and continue to follow me say Amen!

everybody *[some enthusiastically, some less so, some downright grimly]* Amen!

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