

This Very Night



Luke 12:13-21

Year C Proper 13

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3	4	5
▲	Susanna - the more conventionally-minded friend of Joanna, who, like her friend, left her home to become a disciple	▲		▲	●	
▲	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	▲		▲	●	
▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence		●	▲	▲	
●	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room		▲			
▲	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		▲	▲	▲	
■	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)		▲	▲	■	▲
●	Matthew - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples		●			●
▲	Younger Brother - a unemployeed young man still living with his parents					▲
●	Older Brother - a very successful businessman who has worked very hard to build up his fortune					▲
▲	Jesus					■
●	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples					●

Scene 1

Joanna , Susanna

{Some of the disciples are sitting around the fire after the midday meal, when Susanna enters.}

Susanna *[sternly, though in jest]* Excuse me, but I'm looking for a wayward wife who ran out on her husband.

Joanna Susanna! It's so good to see you!

Susanna It's good to see you, too. We've missed you at the dinner parties.

Joanna *[to the group]* I'm sure you all remember Susanna. She's the one person I've wished could be here with me all these months!

Susanna What, me and not Chuza?

Joanna Chuza goes without saying!

Susanna He misses you terribly. He sends his love.

Joanna Well, that's all very good, but I've been expecting more than that from him. A few weeks ago, we decided to donate more money to the rabbi and he dispatched a messenger with it, but the man hasn't caught up with us yet.

Susanna Well, he just did. I am the man!

Joanna So that's why you're here!

Susanna Not entirely. I also brought some money of my own. And...myself!

Joanna Susanna! Do you mean you're staying?

Susanna For a little while, anyway, just to see what it's like.

Joanna That's wonderful! Come on, let's let your stuff stowed away, and get you some food, and then I'll introduce you around properly.

{They exit.}

Scene 2

James , Judas , Matthew , Peter , Phillip

Phillip *[calling after the departing women]* It was nice meeting you!

Peter Um, who was that woman we were supposed to remember?

Judas The wife of that Pharisee whose house we ate at a few weeks ago. Remember now?

Peter I'll never forget that night, but I still don't remember *her*.

Phillip Peter! She sat right at our table! When she wasn't tending to the party, anyway.

James [*coldly*] As you might recall, Peter and I were exiled from the head table that night.

Peter Don't tell me you're still sore about that!

James [*urgently*] It wasn't just the disrespect. If you or I had been at the head table that night, everything might be different today.

Judas What on earth can you mean?

James [*flashing out at the whole group*] We wouldn't have let her get to him!

Phillip Who, Susanna?

James No, no, no! Mary!

Matthew [*ominously*] But Susanna, too. Joanna along with Mary, and now Susanna.

James Exactly!

Peter But that turned out well, didn't it? So maybe it was all to the good that we weren't there to muck it up.

James [*in distress*] I don't understand what the rabbi is thinking, accepting their service. Everywhere we go, we have to make accommodations for the women. And we can't move as fast or as far, because of the women. And I think...I think they're - changing how he thinks about things. He's accepting anybody and everybody these days. Maybe we'd be in Jerusalem right now if it weren't for them!

Judas [*firmly contradicting him*] No, we'd be done. Don't forget, almost all the money is coming in through them or their friends these days. We'd be done.

Matthew Money isn't everything.

Phillip But we still need it, don't we? How would we buy food or pay for accomodations?

Matthew God would provide.

Scene 3

James , Joanna , Judas , Phillip , Susanna

{Joanna is introducing Susanna to the group. Jesus is not present.}

Judas *[to Susanna]* Is that the donation?

Susanna Yes. *[giving him a small bag]* Please accept this gift from Joanna and her husband and me and my husband.

Judas *[counting up the coins in the bag]* Nice! I'd guess that you could have put on three dinner parties like the one we went to with this money. We'll be able to live on it for three months!

Phillip We should spend one month's worth on a party just like that one! *[to Susanna]* Ma'am, that was the best dinner party I ever went to in my life! Aren't you going to miss them now that you're with us?

Susanna Well, the highlight of the party you attended was its guest of honor, and now I get to walk with him every day!

James *[under his breath]* Hmmpmpph!

Judas *[amused]* James, did you have something to say to our benefactor here?

James I, uh, um...I thank you for the gift.

Judas *[continuing to tease him]* That's it? That really doesn't sound like you. Are you sure there isn't more...?

James *[flatly]* I'm surprised your husband let you come.

Susanna *[unaware of the tension in the air]* Well, it was easy for me, unlike Joanna. What she did -

Joanna *[interrupting]* Susanna! I don't think they need to know all the details.

Susanna You haven't told them about how you left?

{Joanna doesn't answer.}

Judas *[amused]* It seems she hasn't! But thankfully, you've now come, and you can fill us in.

{Susanna says nothing.}

Judas *[in jest]* Consider it a requirement to join the group!

{Susanna hesitates, not sure whether to give away Joanna's secret.}

Phillip It's all right. We're all friends here.

Susanna Okay. *[to Joanna]* I'm sorry, but they should know how big a sacrifice you made! *[to the group]* Her husband was furious when she told him she wanted to join you. He threatened to divorce her if she left!

Phillip Wow! *[to Joanna]* How did you change his mind?

Joanna *[embarrassed, trying to avoid telling the truth]* It wasn't like that. I knew he'd come around...

Susanna She did not! At least not before she left. She walked out the door of her house a divorced, homeless, penniless woman, as far as she knew. It was the bravest thing I ever saw!

Joanna No, no, Susanna. He was naturally upset. Like I would have been if he'd suddenly announced he was leaving home for who knows how long. And I knew he'd come around.

James *[Unable to contain himself any longer.]* No!

{Everyone is stunned, and braces to hear what offensive thing James might say.}

James *[forcing out the admission]* Your friend is right. You shouldn't duck it. You were brave.

Joanna *[surprised he's being nice to her]* Oh! All right. Thank you.

Phillip What a day! We get a new follower, we learn Joanna's story, and James is...nice!

James *[genuinely miserable]* Shut up.

Judas And don't forget the most important thing of all. *[Holding up the bag.]*
The money!

Scene 4

James , Joanna , Judas , Phillip , Susanna

{The group has broken camp and is on their way into the town.}

Susanna So Mary will be there?

Joanna Yes, she and some others went with the rabbi earlier today to do some preaching. They were going to come back to the camp afterward, but now that we have money for lodging...

Susanna My coming with the money made the difference whether you were going to sleep indoors or out tonight?

Phillip We live day to day around here.

Judas Like the birds of the air.

James No!

{Everyone stops in shock again, wondering what James will say.}

James *[painfully]* It's not true. We don't live day to day. You said it yourself, Judas: we've got three months worth of financing now. And there have been times before when the treasury was just about as full, haven't there?

Judas Sure, but what of it?

James *[continuing the painful admission]* We're not the daring believers in God's provision that we like to think we are! We accept these donations; we even solicit them. And we measure them out very deliberately. *[to Susanna]* It's not that we ran out of money exactly today and then you came miraculously along. We were just being tight with it, because the treasury was getting low.

Phillip But that's just common sense. Shouldn't we try to be wise with our money?

James *[stubbornly]* I could wish we were more foolish in some cases.

Judas *[getting a little heated himself]* Like what? Like when someone offers us a donation, we refuse it?

James *[defiantly]* Some donations, yes.

Phillip Which donations?

James *[after a pause to marshal his arguments, to Susanna]* I have an apology to make to you.

Phillip Wow, first he's nice to Joanna, and now he's going to apologize to Susanna!

James *[angrily]* I wasn't *nice* to Joanna! I was truthful. She *was* brave to try following us, and that would be true even if we had done the right thing when she came to us and turned her away! *[to Susanna]* I told you a lie earlier, but now I'm going to tell the truth. I'm *not* thankful for your money. I think we should have refused both it and you, just as we should have refused your friends.

Phillip James, that's a terrible thing to say about the women. They've been great disciples so far!

Judas Not to mention, they've allowed us to reach people who probably would never have listened to us otherwise.

James *[in full rant]* Yes, yes. Everybody's on the women's side and against me. You're all enlightened and I'm a monster. But tell me honestly, all of you: if Mary and Joanna had come to us back when they did, except with no money in their hands, would you have let them join us?

Judas *[angry himself now]* I'll answer that if you'll answer this: What if we had no money at all, and were forced to sleep by the road every night and beg for our food. Would you - would any of us - still be following the rabbi?

Scene 5

James , Jesus , John , Matthew , Older Brother , Younger Brother

{The group reaches the town and finds Jesus in the public square, done with his preaching and now answering questions from the crowd.}

Younger Brother Rabbi! Rabbi! You have to help me!

Older Brother Hey! Don't bother him with your petty whining.

Younger Brother It's not petty! It's fifty thousand dollars!

Older Brother And it's mine. You don't have a case!

Younger Brother Rabbi, please!

Jesus Tell us your problem.

Younger Brother Our father died but left no will, so all his money went to my brother. And now he won't give me my share!

Older Brother Why should I? I basically supported my father - and my brother! - these past five years. It's really my own money I'm getting back! *[to his brother]* You didn't contribute a cent.

Younger Brother At least I was there! All he ever saw of you was your gold.

Older Brother Which I worked hard for! And every hour I worked, I worked for our father.

Younger Brother You worked way harder than you needed to just to support father! You worked every minute of the day, and every minute you worked, it was for you alone! The money you sent us was a drop in the bucket. It was guilt money! Meanwhile, I had to live with that man for five long years. I did my duty and I'm not walking away with nothing!

Older Brother I know you tried to convince him to include you in a will, but he saw through your act as easily as I did!

Younger Brother Rabbi, you have to help me. Tell him to give me my share of the inheritance!

Jesus Well, well. It's a hard problem. Let's see if any of my followers can solve it for you. *[to the disciples]* Who would like to answer this young man?

Matthew If there was no will, the law gives the inheritance to the eldest son. *[to the Younger Brother]* I assume that's him. If that's the case, the law is the law. You have to accept it.

Jesus A good answer. Anybody else?

John There's more than just the law. There's grace. That's what we're all about! *[to the Older Brother]* There's what is strictly legal, and then there's what's fair and just. And then beyond that, there's what's merciful, and generous.

Jesus Another good answer. Is that it? *[No one else jumps in.]* Very well, then. *[to the brothers]* You have been answered -

James No!

{Everyone is stunned into silence. James pushes his way through the crowd to Jesus.}

James I don't know the law like Matthew, and I guess everyone knows I don't understand grace like John, but there's one thing I know when I see it: a greedy jerk! *[turns to the brothers]* And I'm looking at two of them. You don't care about justice *or* the law, much less mercy. I'll bet you didn't even care that much for your father. You just want the blasted money! *[to Jesus]* You should tell them to give us the money - no, wait, we don't want the money, either! You should tell them to give it away, and then come and join us.

{A long silence.}

Jesus Once upon a time, a rich man had a huge harvest, way beyond what he would store in the normal course of business, and decided to tear down his existing silos and build a new enormous one to hold it all. He thought to himself, "I'll store up enough that I'll never have to worry about money for the rest of my life! I'll live a life of leisure, doing what I please and going where I will. I won't have to answer to anyone else ever again!" And which of us would not do the same? He had achieved the dream that everyone works for! But think about all that grain, stored in that super silo. Grain was meant to feed, but this grain would not nourish anyone except for the mice. The money it would have sold for was meant to be circulated, to facilitate the people's common life, but this money would remain forever only in its owner's account books. The man himself was meant to give and take, dependent on his fellows and depended on by them, but he had removed himself from their society.

That night, an angel of God came to him and said, "Fool! This very night, your life will be required of you! And who then will enjoy the abundant harvest God blessed you with?"

[to the brothers] I say to you... *[to the crowd]* I say to you all! *[to his disciples]* I say to every one of us: beware of greed!

You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
www.WineskinProject.net/blog/rich-fool

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