

Gag Rule



*Matthew 8:14-17; Mark
1:29-39; Luke 4:38-41*
Year B Epiphany 5

copyright © 2014
Freeman Ng
www.AuthorFreeman.com

Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3	4
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲			●
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the 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	■			▲
■	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room	▲	▲	▲	▲
▲	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		▲		
●	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence		●		
▲	Jesus		▲	▲	●
▲	Sick Woman - a woman with a chronic, debilitating medical condition			▲	
▲	Paralyzed Man - a man whose legs were crushed in an accident			▲	
▲	Possessed Woman - a woman possessed by an evil spirit			▲	
●	Possessed Man - a man possessed by an evil spirit			▲	

Scene 1

James , John , Judas , Peter

{James, John, and Judas in the aftermath of Jesus casting out the demon in the synagogue at Capernaum.}

James *[gleefully]* We're in! We've hit the jackpot! We're made men! You and me!

John What are you talking about?

James Didn't you hear what the evil spirit said?

Judas That your rabbi is the Messiah.

James Exactly!

John But we already believed that. What does it have to with us?

Judas Your brother sees the two of you as having gotten in on the ground floor.

James That's right! We gambled on this guy, and the dice just came up seven.

John I still don't see why that makes us "made men".

James Because we were there first. And we're in charge. Can you imagine the power we'll hold once his Kingdom is established?

{Peter enters just in time to hear James' last line.}

Peter What's that?

John We were talking about how the evil spirit confirmed that the rabbi is indeed the Messiah.

Peter Yeah, but what was that about "we're in charge"?

Judas *[to James]* So you took my advice.

John It was nothing. No one's in charge - except the rabbi.

James Yeah, but like Judas said, we need to have some leadership within the group, too. Someone to organize things.

Peter *[belligerently]* And you think that's you?

James Who else should it be? John and I found him first. We have leadership experience - over a whole fishing fleet and not just one little boat.

Peter So you sat on your butts giving orders to others. I did more work on my "one little boat" that you probably did in a week!

James Hey, we were out there on a boat along with all the rest. We worked as hard as anybody in our employ!

John Guys, please! We shouldn't fight like this!

Peter *[calming down]* Don't worry, John. I'm not going to sweat it. If your brother wants to pretend he's second in command for now, that's fine. But before there can be a Kingdom, there has to be a fight. With Rome. And we'll see who the rabbi will like best after that.

James I'm not afraid of any fight!

Judas Good! May God grant it. And soon. Through your rabbi, if he's really the Messiah.

James What do you mean "if"? The evil spirit said so - and it ought to know!

John I don't know if we should trust anything an evil spirit says.

Judas *If* it was an evil spirit.

Peter "If" again? What's with you?

Judas There's always the possibility the man was just mentally ill.

John I suppose so, but he clearly changed. The people at the synagogue say it's like night and day - and he hasn't reverted at all.

Judas Why would he revert if he was genuinely healed?

Peter *[with inexplicable urgency]* What???

James Wait a minute. Are you saying our rabbi has the power to heal?

Judas Why not? Why is that harder to believe than him having the power to cast out evil spirits?

Peter *[still with urgency]* Hold on! Are you saying that the rabbi can heal, like, any kind of sickness? Like what if it's not in someone's head, but in their body? Like they're paralyzed or leprous?

Judas Well, I'm not saying for sure that he can do any of that. I'm just saying: if you believe he can cast out an evil spirit, you should also believe he can heal mental illness. And sure, if he can do either of those, then healing any other kind of ailment ought to just as

believable.

Peter *[triumphantly]* Yes! Yes!!!

{Peter runs off.}

James What got into *him*?

John I don't know...but Judas, there's something I don't understand. Clearly, one of those things happened today. The rabbi performed some kind of miracle, even if you're not sure what type it was. If you're sure about that, why aren't you sure he's the Messiah?

Judas Well, there have been plenty of miracle workers who weren't the Messiah. I've seen my own rabbi do some pretty amazing things, but he's admitted he isn't the Messiah. Your rabbi might simply be another man like that: gifted with some great power, but not the One who will lead us to freedom.

James What about what the evil spirit said?

Judas Even if it *was* a genuine spirit, did you notice that your rabbi never responded to what it said, either to confirm it or deny it?

Scene 2

Jesus , Matthew , Peter , Phillip

{Matthew and Phillip discuss the day's events with Jesus.}

Matthew Even the evil spirits declare it! You are truly the Messiah, the Anointed of the Lord, come to establish your Kingdom!

Phillip I have to admit, I had my doubts, but wow! You're really the One, aren't you?

Jesus *[tersely]* Speak of this to no one.

Phillip Huh? Why not?

Matthew Is it that you wish to make the proclamation yourself?

Jesus Just - keep it quiet.

Matthew Is it because it was an evil spirit that first said it? I'm sure the people are taking that as a sign of veracity. "Even the evil spirits acknowledge him!" is what they're saying.

Phillip Yeah, the word is spreading through the town like a fire.

Jesus *[with a sigh]* Perhaps it's time to move on.

{Peter enters just as Jesus is speaking.}

Peter What? Are we leaving? We can't!

Jesus It's time to move on to the next town.

Peter No! We can't! We have to - we have to stay at least one more day.

Matthew We could stay even longer than that. The whole city is buzzing with the news of what you did. They'll be coming out in droves for days!

Jesus *[decisively]* We won't be here. Many more towns await.

Phillip Are we expected somewhere?

Peter *[with inexplicable urgency]* Rabbi, please! Just one more day! One more appearance!

Jesus I'm sorry, Peter, but -

Peter *[interrupting desperately]* No! No! You have to stay! You can't leave yet!

Matthew *[in shock]* Peter!

Phillip Dude, what's the matter with you?

{A long silence.}

Jesus *[gently]* What is the matter?

Peter *[painfully]* It's my mother-in-law. She's sick. She's burning up with a fever and the doctors say it could kill her, but nobody can bring it down. Except you! Can you? I didn't even think of it until Judas said so. Can you?

Jesus Maybe, but...

Phillip Surely, our plans in the other towns can wait one more day.

Matthew This is a tremendous opportunity to win over the entire town. First the possessed man, and then a sick old woman. You can demonstrate your power over every kind of evil.

Peter Rabbi, please! Please! I'll do anything. I'll give you my life!

Jesus *[distractedly]* Haven't you already pledged that?

Peter *[crestfallen]* I have. And I'll stand by it. I guess I have nothing else to offer.

Jesus *[after a pause]* Take me to her.

Scene 3

Jesus , Paralyzed Man , Peter , Possessed Man , Possessed Woman , Sick Woman

{Later, Peter addresses a crowd gather in front of his mother-in-law's house.}

Peter *[joyfully]* It's true! He healed my mother-in-law. The doctors couldn't do a thing; they said she was dying! But she's sitting up having tea right now. You know her! You can go see for yourselves.

Sick Woman Please! I've had this cough all my life. Some days, I can't even leave the house, it leaves me so weak. Can your rabbi help me?

Paralyzed Man Can he really heal my legs? This is no illness. They were crushed, years ago, in a rock slide. Can he really reknit the bones and regrow the muscles?

Possessed Woman He can! For he is the Chosen One of God! He is the Deliverer! The Savior!

Possessed Man Keep him away! He's come to destroy us! He's come to send us back to the pits of Hell!

{Jesus enters.}

Peter Rabbi! These people have come to be healed, too. You can do it, right?

Sick Please help me! Please! I've lived in this town all my life;

Woman	everybody knows me. They know I've been sick since I was a child. If you heal me, the whole town will know with a certainty that you are of God.
Paralyzed Man	Listen: I was a merchant in my day - and very successful. I'm broke now, I've lost it all - all I can do with these legs is beg - but I former associates, friends in every city in the region, and if you can truly heal me, I'll see that news of your power is broadcast throughout the land. You'll be welcomed with open arms wherever you go! You'll be able make a fortune, or raise an army, or found a new religion: whatever you want!
Possessed Woman	You question whether he can heal you? You think he needs your help to claim his Kingdom? He is the Anointed One, the Savior. "Surely he has taken up our pain, and carried our sicknesses!"
Possessed Man	Destruction! Nothingness! That's what he brings! Banishment to outer darkness!
Jesus	<i>[falteringly]</i> I...must go. There are other towns. <i>{Everybody begins talking at once, until Jesus interrupts them. (Jesus should wait until everybody is about half way through their speeches.)}</i>
Peter	<i>[simultaneously with everybody else, until interrupted by Jesus]</i> Rabbi, why won't you help them? Listen to me, everybody! He really can do it! He healed my mother-in-law! Hey! Quiet down! Let him talk!
Sick Woman	<i>[simultaneously with everybody else, until interrupted by Jesus]</i> No, don't pass us by! You have to help us! Please, have mercy! All my life I've been crippled by this cough. I can't go out! I can't play with my grandchildren!
Paralyzed Man	<i>[simultaneously with everybody else, until interrupted by Jesus]</i> This is outrageous! Can't pass us by! You can't dole out the healing just to your friends! It's not fair! We're just as deserving as that fisherman's mother!
Possessed Woman	<i>[simultaneously with everybody else, until interrupted by Jesus]</i> A Messiah who refuses his title! Why is that? Why do you fear the adoration of the crowd? Why will you not claim your birthright? Behold! The kingdoms of the world are yours!
Possessed Man	<i>[simultaneously with everybody else, until interrupted by Jesus]</i> Good! Leave us! Leave us to our mischief and our misery. You have no place here among the denizens of this world! This world is the abode

of pain and punishment.

Jesus *[interrupting them]* Very well! Very well! *[after a pause]* I will do what I can for all of you, but you must not speak of this afterward. *[to the crowd]* No one here must carry any report away from here!

Peter But why? Don't we want to spread the word?

Jesus *[to the crowd]* Will you do as I ask?

Sick Woman Of course. Whatever you say.

Paralyzed Man Sure, though I must say, it's an odd condition.

Jesus It's not a condition. I will heal you no matter what. And I ask that you keep it quiet.

Paralyzed Man All right. If that's what you want.

Jesus *[solemnly]* Come to me, then, all who wish to be healed.

Scene 4

James , Jesus , Judas , Peter

{The next morning, Judas, James, and Peter find Jesus in a solitary place.}

Peter *[calling for Jesus]* Rabbi!

Judas So everything's ready, should it happen. All I need to do is give the thumbs up.

James What do you mean, "should it happen"? It's definitely going to happen. You can give your "thumbs up" right now.

Peter Rabbi!

Judas *[carefully]* Let's find him first, and we'll see.

James O ye of little faith!

{Jesus enters.}

Peter There you are! Everybody's been looking for you. Not just us, but the townsfolk.

James This is Judas. He's has a very generous offer for us.

Judas *[to Jesus]* Word has gotten around about the healings you've performed. People are clamoring for a chance to see you. Not just for healing, but to hear what you have to say. I took the liberty of making some arrangements: places to appear, people to meet. If you're willing.

Jesus We appreciate your help, but we have to be moving on.

James Rabbi, why? This is the perfect opportunity!

Jesus There are other towns I must preach in.

Judas For what it's worth, this will prepare the way for you better than anything else would. Your ministry in these other towns could be magnified tenfold.

Jesus My forerunner is already in the world, doing his job. That is sufficient.

Peter Rabbi? What about all the people who need healing? Like my mother-in-law did. There'll be people like that at every stop. Can't we help them first, and then move on?

Jesus *[tersely]* We can't. We have to go. *[to Judas]* Thank you again for your offer.

{Jesus exits.}

Peter *[dumbstruck]* I'll be damned.

James *[to Judas]* Sorry. I had no idea he'd refuse.

Judas That's all right. It's what I warned you about. He's a whirlwind, an earthquake. He goes where he will, and strikes when he wishes. Do what you can to gain some control over his impulses, and perhaps we'll meet again.

Copyright © 2014 by Freeman Ng and the Wineskin Project

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