

# Not Peace but a Sword



*Matthew 10:34-42; Luke  
12:49-56*

*Year C Proper 15 ; Year A  
Proper 8*

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## Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3	4	5
▲	<b>Susanna</b> - the more conventionally-minded friend of Joanna, who, like her friend, left her home to become a disciple	▲		▲		
▲	<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>Peter</b> - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room		▲			
■	<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>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>Jesus</b>			▲		■
▲	<b>Man #1</b> - a representative of a respectable and well moneyed group working toward the renewal of Israel that's interested in donating to Jesus' ministry				▲	●
▲	<b>Man #2</b> - a representative of a respectable and well moneyed group working toward the renewal of Israel that's interested in donating to Jesus' ministry				▲	●

## Scene 1

Joanna , Susanna

*{Joanna and Susanna are out walking late at night while the others are back at the camp sleeping.}*

**Susanna** Are you sure this is safe?

**Joanna** You know, I never thought about it before. I like taking these walks when everybody's asleep. It's a little safer now that I have you for company, but I suppose we should stay within shouting distance of the camp.

**Susanna** It's a beautiful night. I never went outside much at home, and even then, it was different. There wasn't all this...space. It's very peaceful.

**Joanna** So, what do you think so far?

**Susanna** About following the rabbi? It's been all right. Not exactly what I expected, but all right.

**Joanna** What's surprised you?

**Susanna** Oh, I don't know. I thought we'd be more...organized, or effective. I thought the rabbi would be...more like he was at the party.

**Joanna** How so?

**Susanna** That night, he seemed like someone with something important to teach us, something important to do, and I was anxious to learn more, to get to know him better, and even to help. Now, I'm not as sure. I listen to his sermons, I do my best to follow them, but they seem to make less and less sense the more I hear. What's our mission? What's our message? What exactly are you and I contributing our money and time and *selves* to?

## Scene 2

James , John , Judas , Peter

*{Meanwhile, back at the camp, James sits up with John, Judas, and Peter.}*

**Peter** *[grousing]* All right, here I am. What's so important that I had to get out of my warm bedroll?

**James** Sorry. I wanted to talk to the three of you about something before we bring it to the others. At the last town, I was contacted by a group of wealthy men interested in contributing to the cause.

**John** That's great! But why do we have to discuss it first? Just have them come on in and talk to us, or to the rabbi. Or better yet, have them come to the next town tomorrow and hear him preach.

**James** That's what I'd like to do, but there's a complication.

**Judas** What's the matter? Is there something unsavory about these people?

**James** No, no, not at all. In fact, their mission is the spiritual renewal of Israel.

**Peter** What's wrong with that? That's our mission, too...isn't it?

**James** It's just that they're very traditional about it. Very conservative. Especially about family morality. They're very strong on marriage and children.

**John** Are they taking it to extremes, calling for adulterers and rebellious children to be stoned and that sort of thing?

**James** God, no! They're on the strict side of things for sure, but only about the principles and not the punishments.

**Peter** Then what's the problem?

*{A long pause, during which James tries to figure out how to explain the situation to the others.}*

**Judas** *[with a smile]* It's *us*, isn't it? *We're* the "unsavory" ones, right?

*{James nods Yes.}*

**Peter** *[raising his voice]* I've never wronged another man in my life! *We* never have.

**James** It's not that we've done anything wrong, but: They're just very conventional, very respectable. All their members come from a very...cultured part of society. And look at us, out here in the woods! We live like a band of robbers!

**John** What do you suggest we do?

**James** At the very least, we should rent some nice rooms in town and meet them there.

**Judas** That's a good idea. We can afford it pretty well, too, since Susanna brought us the additional donation.

**John** All right. I'm okay with that, as long as we don't try to make them think we live that way all time. After all, the reason we camp out so often is precisely that we're often short of money.

**James** I'm sure that'll be fine.

**Peter** *[getting behind the idea]* And it'll be great to sleep in a real bed for a night!

**James** Um...that's another thing I wanted to talk to you about. I don't think we'll need rooms for everybody. Some of us should probably stay here.

**Peter** Meaning me. Why?

**Judas** We're really pretty good money-wise right now, and if your rich donor sees that we're not all there, he might guess that we're just putting on a show for him.

**James** *[to Judas]* It's not about the money. *[to Peter]* And it's not just you. *[to Judas]* And there's nothing wrong with being perceived as putting on a show for him. In fact, I *want* him to see that.

**Peter** *[angrily]* Okay, I get it. You don't want me in your show. I'm not cultured enough. I'm too crude. I'd just say something stupid that...*[suddenly laughs]* You're right, I shouldn't be there!

**John** I suppose you'll want the women to stay away as well.

**James** Yes. In fact...I think we should go further. I think we should send them away permanently. Now hear me out! These people are traditionalists. They will never, ever give us a cent if we have women in the group, and if we mislead them about it now just to get their money, they'll eventually find out and there'll be big trouble.

**Judas** Joanna and Susanna between them account for 95% of the current treasury.

**James** These people can make that look like loose change.

**Judas** But they haven't agreed to do that yet. What if we send the women away in order to court these people, but then they decide not to contribute? We'd be left with nothing.

**Peter**     *[outraged]* What's all this talk about money? What about loyalty? They joined us, they took that risk. I admit I didn't like it at first, but they're members of the group now. They're my comrades!

**James**     Okay, how about this? The women stay in the camp while we bring the donor into town. If he decides to donate, we find out tactfully if there would be any problem with having women in the group. If he says yes, we bring the whole issue to the rabbi. If he says it's okay to send the women away under those circumstances, they're gone.

**John**       All right. As long as nothing is done until we speak to him.

**Peter**       *[grudgingly]* He's the boss.

**Judas**       Sounds reasonable to me, and you know, I'd suggest one more thing. We should ask the rabbi to preach a sermon specifically about the family values these people care most about.

**James**       That's a great idea! John, could you talk to him first thing tomorrow?

**John**       You know how he usually responds to our suggestions, but I guess it wouldn't hurt to ask.

### Scene 3

Jesus , Joanna , Susanna

*{Joanna and Susanna walk a while in silence as Joanna ponders Susanna's question from scene 1.}*

**Joanna**       Susanna, I hear what you're saying. I felt that way myself sometimes, when I first joined. But somehow over time --

**Susanna**     *[interrupting Joanna with a gasp]* Jo!

**Joanna**       *[startled]* What? What's wrong?

**Susanna**     *[in a frantic whisper]* There's someone out here!

**Joanna**       *[peering into the darkness]* Are you sure? I don't see anybody.

**Susanna**       There, sitting at the base of that tree. See?

**Jesus**         *[groaning]* Ahhhhh!

**Joanna** Oh my God, you're right! But it sounds like someone who's hurt.  
*[into the darkness]* Excuse me! Is someone there? Are you all right?

**Susanna** Joanna, what are you doing?

**Jesus** *[painfully]* What will I? What will I?

**Joanna** It's the rabbi!

*{They come to Jesus, who's kneeling in anguished prayer.}*

**Susanna** Rabbi, what are you doing out here? Are you all right?

**Jesus** *[still in anguish, not noticing them yet]* To send fire onto the earth! To send fire!

**Joanna** We don't know what you're talking about!

**Jesus** *[looking up and seeing them for the first time]* Joanna. Susanna.

**Susanna** We're sorry to disturb you. We were taking a walk. Are you all right?

**Jesus** I've come to send fire onto the earth, but what will I do if I find the fire already kindled?

**Joanna** I, uh, I don't know.

**Jesus** *[solemnly]* I'm sorry. I'm sorry for disturbing your walk. I'm going back to my bed now. There's a...baptism I have to undergo. Let it come one day closer.

#### Scene 4

James , John , Judas , Man #1 , Man #2

*{The next day, the disciples meet with two members of the potential donor group in town.}*

**James** Thanks for meeting with us.

**Man #1** Thanks for inviting me. I've been very anxious to hear your leader preach.

**James** I think you're going to like what you hear. *[to John in a whisper]* Right?

**John**     *[whispering back to James]* Right. He agreed to preach about families.

**Judas**     *[to the men]* What is it about him that interests you?

**Man #2**     We're interested in any and all teachers of the Word. We not only support itinerate preachers like your leader, but young men preparing for the priesthood or studying the law, and even many temples and synagogues.

**Judas**     Isn't the mission of your group the renewal of Israel?

**Man #1**     It is indeed.

**Judas**     But not the *liberation* of Israel?

**Man #1**     No! That too, of course. As a matter of fact, we believe they go hand in hand.

**Judas**     Then why are you supporting priests, temples, and synagogues, when they in turn support the Roman occupation?

**Man #2**     Let me ask you something. Is your group in favor of violent revolt?

**Judas**     Yes, if necessary.

**James**     *[jumping quickly in to mitigate what Judas just said]* But the rabbi has never said so directly. What he *has* done is consistently preach peace.

**Man #1**     Don't worry. We don't care whether you espouse violent methods or not. What we do care about is whether you espouse righteousness.

**Man #2**     There's an epidemic of divorce, dishonor, and disrespect for parents these days. In olden times when things got this bad, God punished Israel by delivering her into captivity. And did the prophets in those days urge the people to rise up against their oppressors? No. They told them to accept their punishment!

**Man #1**     Unless Israel returns to the ways of God, she'll never be liberated. She *shouldn't* be liberated. But once she does, she *will* be liberated.

**Judas**     *[argumentatively]* Just like that? Without a single sword blow?

**James**     *[hissing reprovingly to Judas]* Judas!

**Man #2**      You do believe in God, don't you?

*{A long pause.}*

**John**      We do, but sometimes we forget. We thank you for reminding us.

**Man #1**      We lend our support to any individual or organization that works to bring the people back to the spirit of the law. That is our hope of salvation.

**John**      If anyone can bring about the change in people's hearts you're hoping for, it's the rabbi.

**Man #2**      That's good to hear.

## Scene 5

James , Jesus , John , Judas , Man #1 , Man #2

*{Jesus stands up before the crowd and looks out at them for a long time before breaking suddenly and roughly into his sermon, which he delivers sternly and dramatically throughout, until the end.}*

**Jesus**      What did you think! *[pauses while the stunned crowd murmurs uncertainly]* What did you think? That I came to bring peace on Earth? *[another pause, but no one answers]* No! I didn't come to bring peace...but a sword!

*{Some members of the crowd attempt a cheer.}*

**Judas**      *[defiantly]* Amen!

**James**      *[to John]* What's he doing? What's happening?

**John**      *[to James]* I don't know! He told me he was going to -

**Jesus**      I have come to set son against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law! A man's enemies will be found in his own home!

**Man #1**      This is outrageous! This is your idea of family morality?

**James**      I, I...don't know what to say. Something's wrong. He's not usually like this!



**Jesus** You have heard it said, Honor your father and mother. But I say to you: whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me!

**Man  
#2** Pernicious, egoistical demagoguery!

**Judas** *[cheerfully defiant]* I find it curiously refreshing!

**Jesus** You have heard it said, Cherish your children. But I say to you: whoever loves his children more than me will be cast away!

**Man  
#1** *[coldly]* I think we've heard enough. Good day.

**James** Wait, please! We're as surprised as you are. There's got to be an explanation! John, tell them!

**John** *[tentatively, after a pause to gather his thoughts]* I think...I think that if someone who claimed to be from God never surprised me, never shocked me, never scandalized me even, at least sometimes, I would be suspicious.

**Man  
#2** You *should* be suspicious!

*{With that, the two potential donors exit. In the meantime, Jesus continues his sermon.}*

**Jesus** Anyone who won't take up his cross and follow me, is not worthy of me! Whoever tries to save his own life will lose it! *[in a quieter voice, his passion spent]* But whoever loses his life for my sake, will find it!

**Judas** *[triumphantly, gazing upon Jesus]* Look at him go!

**James** *[despondently, gazing after the two departing donors]* Look at them both go.

**John** It's all right, James. We'll survive.

*{The crowd begins to disperse, sensing the show is over, but Jesus calls them back to attention.}*

**Jesus** And one more thing! *[waits for the crowd to quiet down again, then gestures to a nearby child, who jumps into his arms]* Whoever receives my disciples receives me, and whoever receives me receives God who sent me. But whoever receives even this little child, bringing her a cup of cold

water in the night...I tell you, he will in no way lose his reward!

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