

The Reluctant Healer



*Matthew 15:21-28; Mark
7:24-37*

*Year A Proper 15 ; Year B
Proper 18*

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3	4	5
▲	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	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲
▲	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	▲		▲	■	●
▲	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	▲		▲	▲	▲
▲	Woman - an Arab woman who comes to Jesus for healing for her daughter		▲		■	
▲	Jesus				▲	▲

Scene 1

James , Joanna , Judas , Matthew

{The disciples are setting up camp one night in a new location.}

James Tyre! What are we doing here among the pagans again?

Matthew I feel unclean just walking on their roads and drinking from their streams!

Joanna You guys should really get around more. The world is a big place, you know. But I have to admit, I'm wondering why we left the seaside myself.

Matthew I'm wondering that, too. It seemed like the Kingdom had come,

what with all the miracles that were happening. Feeding five thousand people with a basket of bread and fish, walking on the water, people being healed just by touching the rabbi's cloak!

Judas I know for a fact that the people were prepared to accept him as king if he had only declared himself.

James You're kidding! Did you tell him that?

Judas I did.

James What did he say to it?

Judas He ordered us to pack up and leave town!

Joanna In response to what you told him?

Judas Not in so many words, but the timing was pretty close.

Matthew Then the timing must not have been right.

James *[a little despondently]* How much righter does the timing have to be? Everything was perfect! We could be ruling at his side right now!

Judas Maybe. Look, I understand how you feel. I partly feel that way myself. But another part of me thinks the rabbi might have been right.

Joanna You believe it would have been premature for him to declare himself?

Judas Possibly. If he's just a local hero of a town, the Romans can easily march in and crush him. Maybe we need to keep on doing what we're doing in more towns. Build a stronger base before we make our move.

Matthew If that's the case, then what are we doing here?

Joanna Maybe he was worried the Romans might in fact be marching on that town, and decided we'd better lay low for a while.

James *[with distaste]* Tyre! Sidon! This is low all right.

Scene 2

James , Matthew , Woman

{The next morning, a woman from the town tries to gain admittance to speak with Jesus.}

James *[angrily]* You again! Look, I already told you, the rabbi isn't seeing anybody today.

Woman *[desperately]* But you didn't even ask him! You didn't even tell him my story!

James Yes I did. And he said, No! Do you understand No?

Woman No you didn't! I watched you! You never woke him, and you've spent all morning sitting by the fire.

James *[outraged]* Now you're spying on us??? Get out of here, before we physically throw you out!

{Matthew enters.}

Matthew What's going on?

Woman Please! Please, sir! If you would just -

James *[interrupting her]* She wants to see the rabbi, and I told her it was impossible, but she won't go away.

Matthew *[reasonably]* I suppose we could wake him. It's almost time for him to get up, anyway.

James *[in a low hissing voice that only Matthew can hear]* Didn't we talk about this last night? We're trying to lay low, right? What do think's going to happen if we let her see him? More townies are going to show up, and what if he starts healing people, or feeding them miraculously again?

Matthew I suppose you're right. What is it that she wants, exactly?

James *[dismissively]* I don't know. Something about her daughter.

Matthew We really shouldn't even be talking to her. She's unclean.

James I know! But I had to stop her yelling and calling for the rabbi.

Matthew *[to the woman]* Ma'am? You're going to have to go back to the town. The rabbi isn't seeing anybody today.

Woman *[firmly]* If you don't want me to talk to him, that's your choice, but you can't tell me where to go! And I'm staying right here!

Scene 3

James , Joanna , Judas , Matthew

{Later that morning, the disciples discuss the problem of the woman.}

Judas Is she still there?

James Yup.

Joanna Is who still there?

Matthew A woman who tried to get in to speak with the rabbi earlier this morning.

Joanna What did she want from him?

Judas What they all want.

Matthew It was something about her daughter.

James She was screaming in my ear about it all morning. I couldn't get rid of her, and she still won't leave!

Joanna Where is she now?

Judas Beneath the palms by the road.

James I guess she thinks as long as she's on a public road, we can't order her away.

Joanna I don't understand why you didn't just wake the rabbi. He's usually up by now anyway.

Matthew *[tersely]* It wouldn't be a good idea for him to talk to her.

Joanna Why not? *[pauses for an answer, but gets none from anybody]* Well? Why not?

James *[with some contempt]* I suppose your going to side with her because she's a woman, but don't forget she's also an Arab!

Joanna So?

Matthew She's unclean. We shouldn't even be talking to her!

Joanna The rabbi's talked to non-Israelis before, you know. We all have!

Judas The difference is that we're apparently trying to keep a low profile right now. Every healing or miracle he performs is going to have positive and negative effects that need to be weighed. Positive because it continues to build his credentials with the people as a possible messiah, but negative because it focuses attention on him that he seems not to want right now. But in the case of this woman, there's no positive, just the potential for harm.

Joanna No positive? I think she might disagree.

Judas I meant in the big picture, in terms of our mission. Helping some Arab woman is not going to bring Israel any closer to freedom. If he's going to risk premature exposure by helping people, it should at least be Israelis, because those are the ones whose hearts and mind we need to sway.

Joanna *[grudgingly]* All right. I get it. But you men! You can be so unfeeling sometimes.

{A commotion sounds from the distance.}

Matthew What's that yelling?

James Oh my God, she's started up again!

Judas *[in alarm]* It's worse than that! Look!

Matthew It's the rabbi! She's gotten his attention and he's walking over to her.

James Dear Lord, we've got to get over there! Come on!

Scene 4

James , Jesus , Joanna , Judas , Matthew , Woman

{The woman begs Jesus for help.}

Woman Lord! Son of David! Please help me! Please help my daughter!

Jesus *[slightly alarmed]* Lord? Son of David? Why are you calling me that?

Woman Please! My daughter is possessed by a demon. She's suffering terribly!

{The others arrive on the scene.}

James Hey! You! Get away from him!

Matthew Master, you shouldn't be talking to her.

Joanna No! Let her speak! Let her speak and decide for yourself!

Judas Rabbi, can we talk? I think it's best we send her away, but that's based on our interpretation of your actions lately. If you could just let us know clearly what your intentions are...

Woman Please! My daughter. Something terrible has her in its grips. It's killing her! You have to help me!

{A long pause while Jesus mulls it over.}

Jesus *[tenderly]* I'm sorry. I can't. I was not sent to you, but only to the lost sheep of Israel. *[in an explanatory voice, as to a child]* It's not right to take the *children's* bread and feed it to the *dogs*.

Woman *[in furious indignation]* The dogs? The dogs???

Joanna *[jumping in quickly to try to make peace]* No, you don't understand! *[in an explanatory voice, as to a child]* He's just talking about Israelis and non-Israelis. We consider non-Israelis to be "unclean", which is *not* a way of saying they're bad people. "Unclean" is just a technical term in our religion. You see, we have an idea in our religion that some things are clean and some things are unclean - which is another metaphor that maybe isn't the best, because it has nothing to do with whether they're good or evil, or morally pure or dirty. It's just a way of putting things into different categories. And both non-Israelis and dogs are considered unclean. It's not an insult; it's just a way of saying, "non-Israeli."

{A pause while the woman thinks it over.}

Woman *[angily and firmly]* Bullshit!

{Everybody gasps in shock.}

James Listen lady, you can't talk to the rabbi like that!

Matthew Rabbi, it's clear there's no reason to continue this.

Judas *[in a lighter tone]* But I want to hear what she has to say now.

Joanna *[still in her explanatory voice]* I'm sorry, I didn't explain it well. Let me try again.

Woman *[angily but evenly]* You made yourself quite clear! You and that rabbi of yours. You two are worse than these men! They hate me and fear me, but at least they don't talk to me like I'm a child! Or, if you like, a dog that's treated like a child. We Arabs have the concept of uncleanness, too, you know, and I know well that there were a dozen other analogies he could have made. And I know when I've been insulted! *[to Jesus]* Nevertheless, I'll play your game. Maybe the children come first, but that doesn't mean you can't do right by the dog as well. Even the dogs get to eat the crumbs that fall from the children's table!

{There's a stunned silence.}

Judas *[in almost delighted surprise]* Touche!

Matthew *[in theological debate mode]* No, no: you're misunderstanding the purity code. As it's written in...*[suddenly less sure of himself]*...in, uh - hold on, I've forgotten the reference...

Joanna I meant no insult. Honestly! *[getting a little angry herself]* If you're going to take offense at every attempt to speak to you in a civil way...

James *[shouting angrily]* We have nothing to apologize for! She's been harassing us all day and it stops right now! *[to the woman]* You!

Jesus *[interrupting in a quiet voice]* James.

{Everybody stops and turns to Jesus.}

Matthew Rabbi, what's wrong?

James Rabbi, don't let her disturb you. We'll take care of her.

Jesus *[again in a quiet voice]* James. *[to the woman]* You have great faith.

Woman Faith? If that's how you want to frame it, fine. Just help my daughter!

Jesus *[simply, humbly, and earnestly]* Your daughter is healed.

everybody *[everybody ad libs shock: "what?", "healed"? etc.]*

Jesus Your daughter is healed. You can go home now.

Woman *[with some weak skepticism that give way to startled belief]* Just like that? You expect me to...I believe you!

{The woman dashes off without another word.}

James Nice! That gets rid of her for a little while, anyway.

Matthew She'll be back, though. I must admit a grudging respect for her tenacity.

Judas Wait a minute. *[to Jesus]* Did you heal her daughter or not?

Jesus Didn't I say I did?

Joanna You really healed the daughter?

Jesus Didn't I say I did?

Matthew I thought it might just be a bluff to get her to leave.

Judas You know she's going to bring the whole town back with her now, don't you?

Jesus *[with a sigh]* It does seem likely.

James We can't have that! What are we going to do?

Jesus Leave.

Scene 5

James , Jesus , Joanna , Judas , Matthew

{The following morning, the disciples gather around the fire at their new camp.}

James *[with distaste]* Another day, another heathen town.

Matthew At least we're closer to home.

Judas But on the wrong side of the water. Are we starting a grand tour of Arab lands, I wonder?

{Joanna enters.}

Joanna Does anyone know where the rabbi went?

Matthew He's not still sleeping?

Joanna No, his tent is empty.

James He's probably off praying somewhere.

{Jesus enters.}

Jesus Good morning!

Joanna Good morning.

Judas Where have you been?

Jesus I wanted to see the town.

James I guess that's okay, as long as nobody saw *you*.

Jesus Actually, someone did.

{There's a sudden apprehensive silence.}

Matthew Did they recognize you? Had they heard about the healing in the last town?

{Jesus doesn't answer.}

Judas *[in some alarm]* I'll take that as a Yes to both questions. What happened then?

Jesus *[reluctantly]* They asked me to heal a deaf man.

James *[in frustration]* Rabbi! What were you thinking?

Joanna *[earnestly]* Seriously: why did you do it?

Jesus *[with a sigh]* It's easy hate people. It's almost as easy to be nice to them. The hard thing is to see them as fellow human beings.

Matthew I suppose this means we'll be moving again. Can we go home this time?

Jesus No, I'd like to remain here for a while.

Judas What are we doing to do when the crowds come out looking for more miracles?

Jesus It won't be a problem. No one will come.

James Why not?

Jesus I asked the deaf man not to tell anyone how he was healed.

{A stunned pause.}

Joanna *[skeptically]* And...you think he's going to comply?

Jesus *[earnestly]* I strictly charged him.

Judas *[hopelessly]* Rabbi...

James *[wearily]* Okay, I'm going to start tearing down the tents.

Matthew I'll go tell the others.

Jesus *[insistently]* I healed him by my power! He called me Lord, and the Christ. Wouldn't he obey my command?

Judas *[pointing up the road]* There's your answer.

{The group looks up the road.}

Matthew What a crowd!

James I think some of them are limping.

Joanna We should stay! We should help them!

Judas If we're going to starting healing people again, we should cross the river first. At least then it'll do some good. Healing a bunch of non-Israelis is going to do nothing for the mission.

Jesus *[thoughtfully]* The mission. *My* mission is a complicated thing. Who can say by what paths I'll come finally to the end appointed me?

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