

Thunder's mother



*Matthew 20:20-28; Mark
10:35-45*

Year B Proper 24

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3
▲	Andrew - the younger brother of Peter, one of the youngest 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	▲		
▲	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	▲	●	
▲	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		▲	
▲	Jesus		▲	
▲	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			●

Scene 1

Andrew , James , Joanna , Judas , Peter

{One evening in the house where Jesus and the disciples are staying.}

Andrew *[angrily]* James! James! Get out there right now!

{Judas enters from the bedroom.}

Judas Hey, keep it down! Some of us were trying to get to sleep.

Andrew *[urgently]* Judas! You should be here for this. *[calling out angrily again]*
James!

{Peter enters quickly, a sword in hand.}

Peter What is it? What's wrong?

Judas Whoa! I have no idea, but I'm pretty sure it's not a Roman attack.

Peter Huh?

Judas You can put that thing away.

Peter Oh! Right.

Andrew James! *[to the others]* Where is he? Is he in the house?

Peter Yeah, he was bedded down - right next to me.

Andrew Get him out here!

Judas Andrew, what's this about?

Andrew You'll see!

Peter All right, hold on.

{He exits back into the bedroom. Joanna enters.}

Joanna What's all the fuss about? We can hear you from the garden.

Judas Andrew seems a little miffed at James for some reason. We're waiting for the villain to appear.

Andrew *[to Judas]* You won't think it's so funny when you hear what he did.

{James and Peter enter.}

Peter Okay, here he is.

James What's going on?

Andrew *[angrily]* You tell us!

James What? I have no idea what you're talking about.

Andrew *[grimly]* I think you do.

Joanna *[in a conciliatory voice]* Andrew? He may well know what you're talking about, but none of us do. So could you tell us?

Andrew All right. Earlier today, James and John approached the rabbi and asked if they could sit on his left and his right when he comes into his kingdom!

Peter *[in outrage]* What the hell!

Judas *[sharply to James]* Is this true?

James No! No way! Why would I do something like that?

Joanna Actually, it seems very like you to do something like that!

Judas *[thoughtfully]* On the other hand...it doesn't seem very like John.

Peter Listen, little brother, are you sure you have your facts straight?

Andrew I'm sure! And it was definitely John, too. He's the one who told me!

James *[in a sudden panic]* What? Did he tell you everything? What did he tell you?

Judas *[jumping in sternly]* Before he answers - do you want to change your story now?

James *[petulantly after a long pause]* Just ask him! He seems to know it all.

Andrew That's actually all I know. Oh, and that the rabbi said NO!

Peter Hah!

Joanna Were you seriously expecting any other answer?

James All right, all right! We asked, he said no, and it's over. No harm, no foul. Right? Can we drop this now?

Judas *[sternly]* We could, except for the questions it raises about...God, about so many things! Your place in this group. Your relationship with us. Whether we can ever trust you again!

Andrew I think we should have a meeting about this. With everybody - and the rabbi.

James No! Come on! It's over, I promise! He didn't just say No; he said he couldn't say Yes! He said that only his Father could pick who would sit at this right and left. So not only will I never try this again, it wouldn't do any good anyway!

Joanna *[drily]* Why do I not find that comforting?

Peter *[magnanimously]* Well, I'm inclined to forget it. Like the man said: No harm done.

Andrew But there *was* harm done! He tried to weasel his way into a top position behind our backs! We can't let that go!

Judas I agree. At the very least, we should discuss it. Maybe James even did us a favor. Whatever may happen when the rabbi ascends to his throne, it might be useful to clarify a few things *now*.

Joanna I concur. I have to say: this is the most...unstructured group I've ever been connected with. *[quickly to Judas]* Don't get me wrong! I think you do a great job of organizing things, but do you it all in the background, without having been granted any real power. And yet, you get a lot done. You make a difference.

Judas *[with a wink of the eye]* It's almost as tough as being the steward of Herod's house.

Joanna *[with fondness]* "Controlling the whirlwind!"

James *[jumping in as soon as he realizes what they're saying]* Hold on! I do a lot around here, too! It isn't just him!

Andrew *[sarcastically]* Yeah, you do a lot of yelling and butting in and sneaking behind our backs, but you don't get much done.

James And I suppose you think you'd do better?

Andrew *[pointedly]* No! I happen to know my limits. But what about Peter?

Peter *[with a laugh]* Noooooooo! Noooooooo! You can leave me out of this. I have no interest in "organizing" anything! I'm just waiting for the fighting to start. Then we'll see who gets the most done.

Andrew *That's* the mark of a true leader!

James That's the mark of a big talker!

Joanna *[in disgust]* You men and your pissing contests!

Judas Well, I haven't made any claims or boasts myself. I'm just happy to help in whatever ways I can. But if we're talking about an interim leader, how about Joanna? She's just as skilled as I am at organizing, from what I've seen and heard, and she has just as many connections, though they're very different connections from

mine, and sometimes she's the only voice of reason in the room.

James Okay, now this is getting ridiculous! It's time to go to bed!

Judas *[suddenly stern again]* After we have a quick meeting. Maybe not to elect a leader, but just to clear the air. Someone wake up the rabbi, and someone go get the others, especially John.

Peter I'll get the rabbi.

Joanna I'll go find the others.

{Peter and Joanna exit.}

Scene 2

Andrew , James , Jesus , Joanna , Judas , Matthew

{Same scene as before. Matthew enters. NOTE: the readers who played Peter and Joanna in the previous scene can play Matthew and Jesus in this one.}

Matthew What's going on here?

Andrew We're going to have a quick meeting. Peter and Joanna have gone to get the others.

Matthew What about?

Judas It seems our comrade James here went behind our backs in order to ask for a high position in the rabbi's kingdom.

Matthew Oh yeah. But the rabbi said No, so what's the big deal?

James *[suddenly panicky again]* Matthew, shut up! We've already discussed it, and that's that! We shouldn't even be waking the rabbi! This is ridiculous!

Matthew Okay, whatever.

Andrew Aren't you bothered by what James and John did?

Matthew Not really. I mean, what choice did they have?

James *[interrupting him]* Shut up! Shut up, Matthew! We don't need to hear the story again!

Matthew But I was defending you!

Andrew What do you mean by, "What choice did they have?"

Matthew Well, I'm not sure what I would have done in their place. Probably the same thing. They were just humoring her.

Judas Humoring who?

James *[in real anguish]* Noooooooooo!

Matthew *[innocently]* Their mother.

James Damn you!

Judas Their mother?

Matthew Yeah, I was nearby when she showed up. I heard it all. She's quite a woman, by the way. All business. Very direct. And very shrewd. I can see why their family business does so well. But there was no way she was going to get anywhere with the rabbi, though he was very sweet about it.

Andrew *[stifling laughter]* Their mother!

James Shut up! Shut up!

Judas *[weakly]* Okay. Okay, I guess we don't need to meet after all. Sorry James.

Andrew *[sarcastically]* Yeah, I am *so* sorry, James!

James *[tightly]* I'm going to bed.

Andrew Maybe we could call your mother back to tuck you in!

James *[exploding in anger]* Listen, I've had enough of you!

Andrew *[yelling back]* How about you trying to get the jump on us!

Judas *[yelling in frustration]* You people are impossible to lead!

{Jesus enters.}

Jesus Peace be with you!

all *[everyone ad libs awkward returns of the peace]*

Jesus I had a strange dream in my *brief* sleep and would like to tell it to you.

Joanna [*suspiciously*] Uh, okay.

Jesus The birds of the air decided to have a pissing contest.

Judas Hah!

Jesus First the biggest of all the birds took a turn, and his pee traveled far indeed.

James [*glumly*] Okay, rabbi, we get the message.

Jesus Then the cleverest of the birds took his turn, and his pee also impressed all.

Andrew That's not what we were doing! This is a serious matter!

Jesus Then the strongest of the birds took his turn, and did not disgrace himself.

Joanna [*in delight*] This is the best parable I've ever heard!

Jesus All the birds eventually had their turn, and when they were finished, they turned to the owls who were the judges and asked them who the winner was. And you do know what the owls said? "Who cares who the winner is? You've stunk up the whole forest! We stopped caring about your stupid game hours ago!"

James All right, very good. I get the point.

Jesus [*gently*] Good. This is how the kingdoms of the world work, through competition and machinations, through domination and destruction, but that's not how our kingdom will work. In our kingdom, whoever wishes to be great must become a servant, and whoever wants glory must become a slave. Just as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Scene 3

John , Mary , Thomas

{*Meanwhile, John, Thomas, and Mary are out taking a walk.*}

John What a beautiful night! "The heavens declare the glory of God!"

Thomas You're in a good mood tonight.

John I am! I'm in a wonderful mood.

Mary Was it because you saw your mother today?

John Not exactly. Mother can be...stressful. But her visit did result in something that made me happy, so yes, I guess she should get some credit.

Thomas I hear you about mothers! So how did it turn out for the good?

Mary If you don't mind telling us.

John Not at all. I already told Andrew earlier. So...she came to...lobby the rabbi on behalf of me and James. She wanted him to appoint us to high positions in his kingdom.

Thomas Aren't mothers terrific?

John *My mother can be terrifying.*

Mary My mother was...invisible.

{They walk a while in silence.}

Thomas We're your family now.

John My family sometimes felt more like a business. We ran a business, of course, but the ways of that business -- how people related to one another, how things got done -- seemed to seep into our family life. It's so refreshing to belong to this group that feels more like a family than any kind of organization.

{They walk a while longer.}

Mary What did the rabbi say in response to your mother's request?

John He said he couldn't grant it, of course, and I was frankly relieved, but then he also asked us if we thought we could "drink the cup he was about to drink."

Thomas What did he mean by that?

John I wasn't sure, but James said Yes right away, and I said Yes, too, not because I thought I could do it, but because I thought I'd die if there was something he wanted me to do that I couldn't.

Mary *[in a faraway voice]* If I could drink that cup with him, I would die of happiness.

Thomas It sounds kind of ominous to me.

Mary What did he say then?

John Then he said -- and this was the thing -- "you will indeed drink from my cup".

{They walk on some more.}

Thomas Still sounds ominous!

John But you've said yourself that you'd be willing to die with us.

Thomas "Willing to." Not "happy to!"

Mary Are you sure?

Thomas What?

{A pause while Mary is too shy to ask again.}

John *[stepping in]* I think she's asking if you're sure you'd be unhappy about it. Albeit willing.

Thomas Is that what you're asking?

Mary Yes.

Thomas Hmmm. It's a good question. I'm suddenly not sure.

John You have the habit of pessimism.

Thomas Yes. Sometimes I just react automatically.

John You're perfectly free to be unhappy about possibly dying with the rabbi, of course.

Thomas Of course. But you'd be happy?

John I'd be happy that I could follow him wherever he went, that I won't have let him down, that I maybe even made that cup a little easier for him to drink.

Thomas And you?

Mary I'd be happy.

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