

Considering the birds



*Matthew 6:24-34; Luke
12:22-34*

Year A Epiphany 8

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3	4
■	Jesus	▲	▲	▲	▲
▲	Man #1 - a member of the crowd who's sympathetic to Jesus' message but just doesn't feel he's up to it himself	▲			
●	Woman #1 - a member of the crowd who's sympathetic to Jesus' message	▲			
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	●			▲
●	Mary Magdalene - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past	▲			
▲	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		■		
▲	Man #2 - a well-to-do member of the crowd who's hostile to Jesus' message		▲		
▲	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room		●		▲
●	Woman #2 - a well-to-do member of the crowd who's hostile to Jesus' message		▲		
●	Man #3 - a member of the crowd who mostly just admires the disciples' dedication, but doesn't feel especially compelled to join them			▲	
●	Woman #3 - a member of the crowd who mostly just admires the disciples' dedication, but doesn't feel especially compelled to join them			▲	
▲	Thomas - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts			▲	
▲	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			▲	▲

Scene 1

Jesus , John , Man1 , Mary , Woman1

{Jesus and the disciples divide a large crowd into smaller groups led by various disciples, which Jesus roams around to talk to. He visits a group led by John and Mary.}

Jesus No one can serve two masters. You'll inevitably come to love one of them and hate the other. You can't serve God and money.

Man1 What exactly does that mean? Surely you're not saying we shouldn't care about money at all.

Jesus Sell your possessions and give to the poor! Provide purses for yourselves that will never wear out, a treasure in Heaven that will never fail. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Woman1 If we sell our possessions and give away our money, how will we live?

Jesus Like the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap. Yet, our Heavenly Father feeds them. And how much more precious are we in His sight? I'll leave you to discuss these things.

{Jesus exits.}

Man1 Well, I appreciate the sentiment - we'd all like to worry less about money and have more faith in God - but if he's asking us to give up all that we own and live hand-to-mouth...well, I just don't think I could do that.

John What he means is that we should value the things of God more than the things of this world. It's a question of priorities.

Woman1 But that's not what he said. He said to sell our possessions. He said we could either love money and hate God or love God and hate money.

Man1 *[to John and Mary]* Have you given away all *your* possessions?

John We have. It's how we all live. What little we have, we hold in common, and what we don't use, we give to the poor.

Woman1 How do you manage it? *[to Mary]* It must be doubly hard for you.

Mary Actually, it's easier for me than for anybody. I had nothing before I met the master; I had nothing to let go of. So I'm not a fair example. But the men have all given up a lot. And one of the

other women was quite rich, and had a wonderful husband. She left it all.

Man1 I just wish there was some middle ground. I'd like to learn more from your rabbi, and if you're really going to work for the liberation of Israel, I want to contribute in some way, but his commandments just seem too extreme. I heard about some of his teachings on anger and marriage, too, and I'm sorry, but it's all just a little too much for me right now.

Scene 2

Jesus , Judas , Man2 , Peter , Woman2

{Jesus visits a group led by Judas and Peter.}

Jesus Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life? Since you can't even do this one small thing, why worry about the rest? Consider the lilies of the field: they neither labor nor spin, yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Therefore, sell your possessions and give to the poor! Provide purses for yourselves that will never wear out, a treasure in Heaven that will never fail. For no one can serve two masters. You'll inevitably come to love one of them and hate the other. You can't serve God and money.

{Jesus exits.}

Judas Okay, if anyone has any questions, we're here to answer them.

Man2 *[belligerently]* We've got a question: do you really expect us to swallow this tripe?

Peter Hey! Watch your mouth!

Judas *[confidently]* No, no, it's all right. *[to the man]* Please, tell me what your objections are.

Man2 First of all, I think his point about worry is misleading. It's true you can't add an hour to your life by worrying - if anything, you'll shorten it - but it's *not* true that you can't do *anything* to extend you life. You can eat right, and exercise, and so forth.

Peter So? The master was talking about worry, and you just admitted he was right about it.

- Woman2** But I don't think he was really talking about worry. I think he was really talking about money. He wants us to stop worrying about it all right - by giving it all to him! Isn't that right?
- Man2** And what about this business of not being able to serve two masters? Of course you can serve two masters; we do it all the time. My boss is one of my masters, but so's the governor of the region, and my rabbi, and even my wife here in many ways. I have no problem serving them all, and I don't have to hate any of them!
- Judas** *[calmly]* You know what? You're both absolutely right!
- Peter** What?
- Judas** They're absolutely right - in ordinary times. On any normal day in the life of this world, you can totally serve many masters, and there are all kinds of constructive ways to deal with anxiety over money besides giving it away. But here's the catch: these are not ordinary times. The Roman oppression is reaching a boiling point, and soon, we'll either break free of their rule or they'll break *us*.
- Woman2** We frankly aren't that concerned about the Romans. They've brought peace and prosperity to the whole world. Our family business has done quite well under their rule.
- Peter** *[belligerently]* Then you're the enemy! You're collaborators, worse than any tax collector -
- Judas** *[interrupting him calmly]* Now, now, Peter. *[to the couple]* I apologize for his rudeness, but he does demonstrate the point vividly. It doesn't matter whether *you're* content with the Romans or not; what matters is that so many others aren't - including us - that you won't be able to avoid the coming day of reckoning.
- Man2** You're crazy if you think you can defeat the Empire!
- Judas** You may be right. We don't claim that we're going to win, only that the time is running out when you can have it both ways. Once the revolt begins, you're going to have to choose one side or the other and give it your all: all your money, all your worries, all of your soul. When the great Day comes, you won't be able to serve both God and - anything else!

Scene 3

Jesus , Joanna , Man3 , Thomas , Woman3

{Jesus visits a group led by Thomas and Joanna.}

Jesus Don't worry about what you'll eat or drink. It's the Gentiles that set their hearts on these things. You should know better! You should know that God is aware of all your needs, and that he will supply them as surely as he feeds the birds of the air and clothes the flowers of the field. Only seek first his Kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Man3 When you say "seek *first*", you don't mean "seek *only*", right? In other words, it's not a question of neglecting our material needs, but more a question of emphasis, right?

Woman3 After all, the birds *do* work to find their food. And the flowers...well, I assume they must work as well in their own mysterious ways to grow their petals and leaves and so forth.

Jesus You can't serve God and money. You can't serve two masters, because you'll inevitably come to love one of them and hate the other. Therefore, sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will never wear out, a treasure in Heaven that will never fail. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

{Jesus exits.}

Man3 *[genuinely impressed]* Wow.

Woman3 *[in wonder]* He really means get rid of all our possessions, doesn't he?

Thomas That's how we live.

Man3 That's amazing. How do you manage it? You must have incredible faith!

Thomas Actually, I'm easily the biggest skeptic in the group. I can't honestly say I believe our master is really the Messiah, and that he'll really be able to take care of us like God takes care of the birds and the flowers.

Woman3 Then why did you join him? How have you been able to stick with it?

Thomas The secret is that I didn't just join *him*. I joined the group. If it was just me having to give up my whole life and believe in a Messiah on my own, I could never have done it, but here, we're all doing those things together. So where I fall short, others with more faith can take up the slack. And hopefully, I can help them in other ways.

Man3 That's very inspiring. I never really thought about faith that way before. I can almost see how I could do it, too.

Woman3 *[to Joanna]* Are you one of the group members with more faith, then?

Joanna *[thoughtfully]* Actually...I don't think my faith is that great, either. I left a lot to join the rabbi, but it's all still waiting for me if I ever quit. So I guess I haven't really given it all up. In a way, I'm in the same boat as Thomas, only it's not so much the group that keeps me afloat as my husband. He didn't divorce me for leaving him, and he continues to be loving and supportive, and so I can go on with very little risk.

Thomas But you didn't know that when you left him, did you? For all you knew, he *might* have divorced you.

Joanna All I can say is, No. There was never a sliver of a worry that he would.

Woman3 How could you be so sure?

Joanna I can't explain it. I just knew. I knew *him* - even though he surprises me every day, and not always in good ways! But I knew he could never surprise me *this* way.

Man3 You had faith.

Joanna *[after a pause for thought]* I suppose I did!

Scene 4

Jesus , Joanna , John , Peter

{After the people are dismissed, Jesus meets with some of the disciples to discuss how the day went.}

- Jesus** *[cheerfully]* So...how was the fishing today?
- Peter** Our fish got away.
- Jesus** Well, that'll happen. Do you have a feeling for why?
- Peter** I don't think they liked the bait. They had a lot of problems with your sermon. I didn't really understand them all, but I thought Judas gave a great answer. They didn't buy it, though.
- John** *[delicately]* Some questions about your sermon arose in our group, too, and we had a hard time answering them because I don't think we were sure what you were saying ourselves. Can you tell us plainly what you meant?
- Jesus** Of course. The message is that you can't serve God and money. You can't serve two masters, because you'll inevitably come to love one of them and hate the other. Therefore, you ought to sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will never wear out, a treasure in Heaven that will never fail. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.
- Joanna** So we were really asking people to give up everything. It wasn't just putting God first, but getting rid of everything else?
- Jesus** You can't serve two masters, because you'll inevitably come to love one of them and hate the other.
- Peter** Uh, I think that was one of the things our group had a problem with.
- Jesus** If they sold their possessions and gave to the poor, then they'd understand. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.
- John** We did point out to our group that we live just that way. Mary talked about how much Joanna gave up to be with us, for example.
- Joanna** Um, actually, I told our group that I hadn't actually give up that much.

Peter Why the heck did you tell them that? No wonder you couldn't close the deal!

John *[gently]* Joanna, you've made enormous sacrifices for the master.

Joanna I have and I haven't. The thing is, I can always go back. My old life is still waiting for me.

Peter So what? Mine is, too, but that doesn't mean it wasn't a leap of faith to leave it.

Jesus I've always been curious, Peter. Why *did* you leave your family?

Peter To follow you, of course!

Jesus But why did you have to leave your family in order to follow me?

Peter *[humorously]* Well, I couldn't very well drag my wife and my children into this life, could I? *[a pause while Jesus makes no answer]* What? You mean I could have? You mean I should have? *[a little angrily]* Look, it's one thing for me to join the fight and take the risks, but my job is also to take care of my family, and I did: *[more and more angrily]* I made sure they'd be financially secure without me. Otherwise, I would never have left them. But now you're saying I should have taken the food out of their mouths and the roof from over their heads?

Jesus *[quietly]* They, too, can't serve both God and money. They, too, could be providing themselves purses that will never wear out, a treasure in Heaven that will never fail.

John *[jumping in before Peter erupts]* Our group just couldn't see themselves going as far as Peter or any of us have. And I guess I can sympathize with them more now. I wish we'd been better at explaining things to them.

Joanna Rabbi, can you tell us what we should have said?

Jesus You should have told them this: You can't serve God and money. You can't serve two masters, because you'll inevitably come to love one of them and hate the other. Therefore -

Peter *[laughing, having gotten over his anger]* All right! All right! You win! We know the drill...

everybody Therefore, sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will never wear out, a treasure in Heaven that will never fail. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

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