

The Wedding Feast



Matthew 22:1-14; Luke
14:15-23

Year A Proper 23

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3	4
▲	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	●		▲	▲
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	●	▲		▲
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲	▲		▲
▲	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	●		▲	▲
●	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		▲		
▲	Chuza - the open-minded, intellectually curious manager of Herod's household			▲	

Scene 1

James , Jesus , Joanna , John , Judas

{The disciples meet with Jesus.}

Jesus Well, what can I do for you all?

Judas *[bluntly]* You can give us some answers.

John *[more tactfully]* We don't completely understand some of the things you've said and done since we entered the city.

Jesus Even you, James?

James I gotta admit, I'm a little confused. I thought when we arrived and you headed straight for the Temple, and especially after you threw those moneygrubbers out, that you'd declare yourself right then and there. Instead, it's just been more preaching. And preaching that I don't totally get.

Joanna That nobody seems to get. Isn't this the worst possible time to start speaking in riddles again?

Jesus I guess you mean the parables.

John Before we talk about them, I wanted to ask about the moneychangers.

Jesus You're not as happy as James or Peter about that, are you?

John I'm...confused about...about...

Joanna About whether we're a peaceful movement or a violent one.

James How exactly are we going to oust the Romans without fighting?

Judas Fighting who? The Temple priests, or the real enemy?

Jesus The "real enemy", like the Kingdom, is not always where you think it is.

Judas "Said the rabbi, speaking in riddles again."

Jesus You're right, I'm sorry. Here's a straightforward answer to John's concern: I promise I won't use violence again.

{A pause while they take this in.}

James *[uncertainly]* Are you saying you were wrong to throw the moneychangers out of the Temple?

Jesus I'm saying I won't do it again.

Judas Are you talking about personal violence - promising you won't lose your temper and lash out again - or collective violence - revealing that we aren't actually going to fight the Romans?

Jesus Our coming to Jerusalem will lead to upheaval and death, and the founding of a kingdom that will spread throughout the world and know no end.

Scene 2

James , John , Matthew , Peter

{Some of the disciples discuss what Jesus has just said.}

Peter So the fight's on, right?

James *[happily]* That's what the man said!

John Did he?

James Come on! You heard him. Look, I know you've never liked the idea of a fight, but it's going to happen, and we're going to win.

Matthew He promised that, too?

James We're conquering the entire world! And our kingdom will last forever.

John That's not exactly what he said.

Peter It doesn't matter to me. All I care about is that we *are* going to fight!

John That's not all that clear to me, either.

Matthew What exactly did the rabbi say?

John First, he promised he wouldn't use violence again.

James But that was just for himself. Like Judas said: getting mad and beating people up.

John He never did answer Judas. What he said was: our coming here will trigger turmoil and death, and the founding of a kingdom that would have no end.

Peter Sounds like fight to me.

Matthew Or it might be spiritual battle. Turmoil of the soul, and the death of immorality and corruption.

John That's what I think he meant.

James Come on, that's crazy! How's that going to free us from the Romans?

Matthew How did Gideon defeat the Midianites with just 300 men?

Peter But they did fight! I'm willing to take my chances that I'll get to be one of the 300.

Matthew The real enslavement of the nation is not to the Romans, but to our sins: our greed and corruption and our loss of true religion. When we free ourselves of them, then the power of God will be with us. That's why the rabbi's been preaching about sons who don't obey their fathers, and tenants who turn against their landlord and kill his servants.

John That makes sense to me. I'm just a little worried that the people don't seem to be taking it that way. The priests are hearing the message loud and clear and they're getting mad, but the people seem to think he's only talking about the priests, and they're feeling even more self-righteous.

James Well, I think it's bunk. We may not be perfect, but we're still God's chosen people, while the Romans are murderous brutes. If anyone needs preaching against - and fighting against - it's them!

Scene 3

Chuza , Joanna , Judas

{Judas accompanies Joanna to her home so he can speak with Chuza.}

Chuza Welcome home at last, my dear!

Joanna Oh, it's so good to be back! I believe you know Judas?

Chuza I do indeed. Thank you for escorting her home.

Judas No problem. I felt we needed to talk.

Chuza Ah yes. How are things going?

Judas Not well. He all but foreswore violence the other day.

Chuza That's not necessarily a bad thing, given how unprepared you are for any kind of fight.

Judas It's true. He's turned away or alienated every potential ally I had lined up.

Joanna Have you two spoken before?

Chuza Shortly after you entered the city. I introduced him to Caiaphas.

Joanna What? Why?

Judas He might be able to help us if...if things go really wrong.

Joanna Judas, we can't trust him! Chuza, I'm shocked that you would think him trustworthy! And how on earth could he help *us*?

Chuza Our high priest may lie and bully, and maybe even kill, but it's always for the nation. Which is more than you can say about anybody else in power in this city.

Joanna No! There's at least one good man on the Council. At least, that's the rumor. He's apparently a secret believer in the rabbi, but that's all I know.

Chuza *[to Judas]* Is this true? That could be a great help!

Judas I think it's true, but I don't know who he is, either. Only the rabbi knows. And only God knows what the rabbi considers "true belief" these days.

Joanna We should ask him. We've got to find someone better than Caiaphas! I don't even understand how you'd expect him to help.

Chuza We'd only ask for his help if it seemed like the rabbi was going to bring destruction upon the nation.

Joanna How could he do that? I wonder sometimes if he's capable of accomplishing *anything*.

Judas The danger is that he'll stir up enough rancor against the priests and the Council that the Romans will have to intervene to restore order. The danger is that he'll stir up rancor against the *priests*.

Joanna *[sadly grasping the issue]* And not against the Romans.

Chuza When we first discovered him, the rabbi seemed like a spiritual teacher only, and that was fine. He was a good one, a fresh voice, and we were happy to support him. Then it looked like he might be the Messiah as well, and of course we were excited about that possibility. But now...

Joanna I've been so frustrated over the good he didn't seem willing or able to do. I didn't think about the harm he might do.

Judas Let's hope it doesn't come to that. At this point, I think the best possible outcome might be a reset.

Chuza A reset?

Judas He backs off of the priests and returns to some of the more generally helpful themes he's preached in the past. Love or humility or watchfulness or whatever. And then - we leave. Go back out into the countryside to gather support for another attempt at Jerusalem another time.

Chuza My God, do you think you could do that? Basically start all over?

Judas I could if I thought there was a chance of doing it right the next time, of truly building a real movement. But I have no idea right now how possible that might be.

Chuza *[to Joanna]* And if they start all over?

Joanna I'm staying. I've been away from home too long. *[to Judas]* We'll continue to donate to the cause, of course.

Chuza And we'll do what we can to prepare for your return.

Judas Let's hope we survive to entertain such possibilities.

Scene 4

James , Jesus , Joanna , John , Judas

{Later that day at the house Jesus and the disciples are staying in.}

Jesus Would you like to hear the parable I'm going to preach tomorrow?

Joanna Yes! Why?

Jesus Well, you were concerned earlier today about the content of my sermons, so I thought I'd give you a sneak preview.

John We're not trying to tell you what to preach. It's just that we're...

Jesus Confused. That's perfectly all right. It's part of how these parables are supposed to work: to be heard only by those who have the ears to hear.

Judas Preaching in code is fine, but you should let us in on the hidden messages. After all, we're your supporters and helpers, not your enemies.

James *[firmly]* Good followers don't need to know all the why's and wherefore's. We just execute the plan.

Joanna But what *is* the plan? Some of us are - yes - confused.

Jesus *[briskly]* Let's see if we can clear that up. Tomorrow's parable is about a king who's planning a wedding feast for his son, and sends out scores of invitations to people all over the kingdom.

John Wait a minute, have you preached this before?

Jesus I have indeed. Do you remember when?

John Wasn't it...wasn't it at that banquet? The one where all the guests were fighting over the best seats?

Joanna That was the last time we were in Jerusalem.

Jesus *[gently to Joanna]* The time you almost left the group.

Joanna Yes. Almost.

Judas *[ominously]* That was also when we first learned that the Temple priests had begun watching you.

Jesus Yes.

{There's a brief awkward silence.}

James *[cheerfully]* Well, I loved the sermon you preached that night, and if

you're going to preach it again, then I say, "Here, here!" This city is full of stuck up people like we saw that night. It'll serve them right to be put in their places.

Jesus Does anybody remember what happens next in the story?

John No one responds to the invitations. They all have other plans.

Jesus Exactly. And some of them even laugh at the idea of going to the king's feast, and some...some seize the servants who delivered the invitations and had them beaten and even killed!

Joanna Wait, what? Did you...did you just add that to the story?

Jesus Yes.

Joanna Why? It seems pretty extreme. Unrealistically so. Don't you want the parable to derive from the real world?

Jesus It's a big world.

Judas *[suspiciously]* And yet, it's small world, too. This is exactly what happened in the parable of the tenants: the servants sent to them being beaten and killed. Are you aiming this parable at the priests again? Are they the invited guests the way they were the tenants?

Jesus *[casually]* Who says the tenants in the last parable were the priests?

{Another awkward pause.}

James *[cheerfully again]* So the king sent out his servants again, only this time -

Jesus *[interrupting]* Actually, before he did that, he sent out his armies, and utterly destroyed the people who had murdered his servants, burning their cities to the ground.

John *[in confusion]* Rabbi, I don't understand why it's necessary to...I don't know, to increase the violence of the story like that.

James *[hopefully]* It's because we're about to enter into a violent struggle, isn't it?

Judas But a violent struggle against who? This parable echoes the last one even more now. The owner of the vineyard had the wicked tenants destroyed as well. *[to Jesus]* And whatever you might say about who the tenants are supposed to be, the priests clearly felt you were

attacking them.

Jesus It's a blessing when anybody recognizes themselves in my parables, whether they're priests, politicians, or paupers.

{Another pregnant pause.}

James *[firmly]* I think it's a good change. Those people deserved death for killing the king's servants.

Jesus I'm glad you liked it. And you did remember the next part of it correctly: the king sends his servants out again, with orders to bring anyone they can find to the wedding, even the poor and the blind and the sick, that his house might be full on the day of celebration.

John *[uncertainly]* I like that ending. There's hope in how it ends.

Jesus At the wedding feast, the man happened on a guest who wasn't wearing a wedding garment.

James Whoa! There's more?

Jesus And he asked him, "Friend, how did you come to be here without the proper attire?" And the man was speechless. And so the king ordered his servants to bind the man hand and foot and cast him into outer darkness, where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Joanna *[painfully frustrated]* "Outer darkness"? "Wailing and gnashing of teeth"? What is that in the world of the parable?

John Rabbi, I'm not criticizing, but it doesn't seem fair to blame anyone for not having the right clothes when the king had them brought in from all over at the last minute, without caring if they were rich or poor.

James I gotta admit: it does seem pretty harsh.

Judas What I want to know is this: who's the underdressed man? What group does *he* represent?

Jesus *[quietly but conclusively after a pause]* Let those who have ears to hear, hear!

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