

Who do they say that I am?

*Matthew 16:13-20; Mark
8:27-30; Luke 9:18-24*



*Year C Proper 7 (Catholic);
Year B Proper 19 ; Year B
Lent 2 (Episcopal); Year B
Lent 2 (Revised); Year A
Proper 16*

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2
▲	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	▲	▲
▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence	▲	▲
▲	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	●	
▲	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	●	▲
●	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)		▲

Scene 1

Joanna , John , Judas , Peter , Phillip , Thomas

{Peter, John, Phillip, and Joanna enter silently, everybody deep in thought.}

Peter Okay, I give up! Somebody tell me what in blazes he was talking about.

{No one seems to even hear him.}

Peter Come on, guys! Help me out.

{Still no replies.}

Peter Okay, fine. I'm the slow one. I'm the dummy. I'm the one that never understands anything the rabbi says. So just leave me in the dark. I'll put on my dunce cap and go sit in the corner.

Joanna *[waking up from her reverie]* Peter, no! I didn't understand what he said any more than you did. But I'm new here, and I was hoping one of other others would explain.

Phillip Well, I guess I can admit it. I was totally lost myself. John's the one who usually explains these things to the rest of us.

{They all look to John, who doesn't answer for a while.}

John *[Worried]* I'm sorry. I don't have a clue, either.

Peter You, too? This is a first! Even John is stumped!

{Thomas and Judas enter.}

Thomas Stumped by what?

Phillip We were just with the rabbi, and he said some really puzzling things.

Judas *[fondly]* So what else is new?

John This was different. It wasn't just what he said, but how he said it. It was who the man was who was saying the things he said.

Peter I don't even understand what *you* just said!

Thomas *[losing patience]* What did the rabbi say? Just tell us already. Never mind what it meant. Just tell us!

John *[soberly]* He said he was going to die.

Judas What?

Phillip No! Wait! Did he really say that? When I was there?

John You didn't hear him say it?

Phillip He talked about *somebody* dying, but I couldn't figure out who he meant.

John It didn't even occur to me that it might be somebody else. His manner was so much like...like someone announcing that he has a fatal disease or something, that I just assumed it was him.

Joanna His exact words were "the son of man." He said the son of man had to die, that he would be killed by the chief priests and the elders.

Thomas Who's the son of man?

Peter We all are, aren't we? Well *[smiling at Joanna]* sons or daughters.

Judas Is he predicting that we'll fail? that we'll all be caught and killed?

John *[correcting them]* It's what he calls himself. The Son of Man. He was talking about himself.

Thomas It amounts to the same thing, doesn't it? If he's arrested and executed, we'll be right there with him.

Phillip What? What do you mean?

Peter What's the matter, kid, are you afraid to die?

Phillip Yes!

Joanna I have to admit: I am, too. I wasn't expecting that it would come to this when I joined.

Peter That's all right, ma'am. We wouldn't expect you to make the ultimate sacrifice, and even the Romans wouldn't execute women. *[to the others]* But you men, you're in this to the end, right?

John I don't want to die, but I don't want to be parted from the rabbi, either. If death is where he goes, I'll follow.

Thomas Sure, we'll die together. What else is there to do?

Phillip Okay. I'll try. But I can't promise I won't run screaming when the time comes.

Peter Well, what about you, Judas? You haven't said a word.

Judas *[after a pause]* I'm going to hope it doesn't come to that.

Scene 2

James , Joanna , John , Judas , Peter , Phillip

{It's the following day and the group is on the move. They walk along the road enaged in various conversations. The scene opens on Judas and James.}

Judas *[to James]* What's your understanding of what we're about?

James This group? The liberation of Israel, of course.

Judas What would you do if you learned that the rabbi was weakening, that he was beginning to talk about being arrested and killed?

James That's absurd. *[after a pause]* Wait, are you saying that he *is* talking like that?

Judas Last night, to John and a few others.

James Which others? Were you there?

Judas I think it was just Peter, Joanna, and Phillip. I heard about it from them.

James Okay, thanks for the report. I'll look into it, but I wouldn't be too concerned if I were you. Who knows what he really said, and how they heard it? Phillip's just a kid, and Peter's not the brightest star in the sky. And John...even though he's my brother, he can be as soft-headed as a woman sometimes.

{James moves off. Phillip comes over to Judas.}

Phillip Can I talk to you? When we were talking yesterday, you were the only one who didn't say he would die with the rabbi.

Judas I suppose I was. Do you have a problem with that?

Phillip No! I don't want to die, either. And you were so sure you weren't going to. How could you be so sure, when the rabbi is saying it will happen?

Judas Because if it really turns out that he's gone off the deep end, I'll leave him before he can bring disaster on us all.

Phillip Leave him? How can you talk like that? Isn't he the One who will deliver Israel?

Judas He may be. And if he really is, there'll be nothing to worry about, because he'll be victorious, and we with him. But listen. Whatever else he might be, he's still just a man, and men can fail, they can pretend to be what they're not, they can lead others astray. They can lead themselves astray. It's the curse of this world that nothing substantial is ever accomplished except through the leadership of some charismatic figure - but there are all kinds of things that can give a man that kind of charisma: anointing by God, or accidents

of physical appearance and bearing...or lunacy.

Phillip What are you saying? No - I don't want to hear any more!

Judas Okay, okay. You were the one asking the questions. I'll leave you alone. But think about what I've said. For your own sake.

{Judas moves off. Phillip seeks out Peter.}

Phillip Peter! Wait up!

Peter Hey, kid. How are you doing?

Phillip Not so good. I've been thinking about what the rabbi said, and I don't know what to make of it.

Peter I've given up trying to figure out most of what he says. If John can explain it to me, great. If he can't, I'm out!

Phillip But don't you wonder why the rabbi said those things? Don't you worry that maybe...maybe he's not the One sent by God?

Peter Of course he is! He said so himself, just before all that other stuff.

Phillip Wasn't it *you* who said it? I don't think he did. Remember? He asked us who people were saying he was, and we told him some of the things we've heard: that he's Elijah or John the Baptist or one of the other prophets. And then he asked who *we* thought he was, and you said, the messiah.

Peter Well, there you go!

Phillip But then he told us not to tell that to anyone, remember?

Peter Oh, yeah. He did. I forgot about that.

Phillip Well, what did that mean? Was he saying you were wrong? Maybe that's what the whole thing was about. Maybe he was saying he *wasn't* the messiah. Maybe that's why he told us he was going to be caught and killed, to show that he couldn't possibly be the messiah. What if he's really -

Peter [*firmly*] Look! I don't know about why he said this or why he said that. All I know is what he IS, the messiah, and I've promised to follow him! Maybe he just didn't want us blabbing it too soon. Maybe the way he'll save Israel is by dying! Who knows? All I know is this: if that's what it is, I'll die with him!

Phillip Thanks, Peter. I really needed to hear someone say they were sure.

Peter *[in sudden thought, doesn't answer right away]* Sure kid, any time. Um, I have to go talk to John. I'll catch you later.

{Peter moves off to walk by John.}

Peter John, who do *you* think he is?

John Are you thinking about what you said last night?

Peter Yeah. I thought I gave the right answer, but then he told us not to tell anybody.

John I thought you gave the right answer, too, and I don't know what to make of the rabbi's response. From that point on, the whole conversation was one stunner after another for me, and I'm not sure what any of it meant, or if I even heard it all correctly. I was kind of in a state of shock.

Peter Do you think it could have been my fault?

John Do I think *what* could have been your fault?

Peter All that talk about dying. I thought I gave the right answer, but maybe I didn't, and maybe that got him started thinking about dying. Maybe...maybe it's all going to fall apart now, because of me! I'm such an idiot. I should never open my mouth again!

John Peter! In the first place, you're not an idiot. Tell me, if he really is arrested and executed, what will you do?

Peter Fight for him to the end, of course. And die with him if it comes to that.

John Then you're the wisest man among us. In the second place, I was going to give the same answer you did. You just beat me to it.

Peter *[sighing]* This is so hard. I thought I liked doing hard things, but this is different.

John It's not so hard. Look, there's the rabbi walking ahead of us on the road. And here we are following. Easy as pie, right?

Peter *[chuckling]* I guess so. The one thing I know for sure is that I can outwalk any man here!

{Joanna catches up with the two men.}

Joanna John, could I speak with you for a moment? You, too, Peter.

Peter That's all right. I'm going press on.

{Peter increases his pace, leaving them behind.}

John It's been quite a morning for conversations on the Way.

Joanna I suppose so! I wanted to ask you about something the rabbi said that I haven't heard anyone discuss. I didn't want to bring it up myself because I'm new here, and maybe you all know about it already.

John As you've seen, we rarely know anything for sure. What did you want to ask me about?

Joanna That bit about being raised.

John What bit?

Joanna At the end. When he said the son of man would suffer and be killed...and then raised.

John He said what?

Joanna Don't you remember?

John That whole conversation was fuzzy in my mind to start with, and it seems to get fuzzier the more I think about it. I supposed "raised" could refer to the way an arrested subversive would probably be killed.

Joanna *[soberly]* On the cross. *[John nods.]* But wait, his exact words were, "raised on the third day."

John On the third day? Then I'm lost again. It might take an extra day to crucify someone because of the Sabbath, but they never hold trials on Fridays for just that reason.

Joanna Could the whole thing be metaphorical? He did go on to say that we had to "take up *our* crosses" as well.

John Did he? You have a good memory! I'm glad you're with us. For all we say we want to follow him, we don't seem to listen to him very carefully most of the time.

Joanna John, do you believe he's the messiah?

John I think he is, but I have to admit I'm a little less sure after last night. But what he is to me more than anything else is a friend, and on that basis alone, I'll follow him to whatever end he chooses, whatever he turns out to be.

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