

New Wineskins

*Matthew 9:9-26; Mark
2:13-14, 5:21-43; Luke 5:27-
28, 8:40-56*

*Year B Proper 8 ; Year A
Proper 5 ; Year B Epiphany
8*

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Parts by scene

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

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ■ | Jesus | ■ | | | ● | ▲ | ■ |
| ● | Man - a random man on the scene (not the same man in every scene) | ● | | ▲ | | | |
| ▲ | Woman - a random woman on the scene (not the same women in every scene) | ▲ | | ▲ | | ● | |
| ▲ | Matthew - the disciple of Jesus when he was still a tax collector | ▲ | | | | | ▲ |
| ■ | Jairus - a religious leader, a good man who loves his daughter | | ■ | | ▲ | ▲ | ▲ |
| ● | Daughter - Jairus' daughter, who's dying of an incurable illness | | ▲ | | | | ● |
| ● | Doctor - the doctor treating Jairus' daughter | | ▲ | | | | |
| ▲ | 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 | | | ▲ | ▲ | | |
| ▲ | Sick Woman - a woman desperate to be healed by Jesus | | | | | ▲ | |
| ▲ | Messenger - a servant of Jairus' | | | | | ▲ | ▲ |

Scene 1

Jesus , Man , Matthew , Woman

{Jesus is preaching to a crowd near the booth of a tax collector.}

Jesus *[in sermon mode]* And so I say to you: beware of money! For you cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve both money and God!

Man Well said! An excellent sermon!

Woman *[to Matthew]* You should listen to this man. Then maybe you'd get out of the disgraceful business you're in!

Man Disgraceful and traitorous!

Woman That's right! You don't just rob the people. You do it for the Romans!

Man What's wrong? Don't you have anything to say?

Woman He never does. He knows his guilt!

Jesus Does he? *[to Matthew]* Do you?

Matthew *[tightly]* I know what I'm doing, and why. I know what needs to be done - and the cost!

Jesus Yes, I think you do. They don't, of course, and you despair of ever trying to make them understand. So you simply get on with job, your head down and your heart closed.

Matthew *[suspiciously]* What is this? Who put you up to this?

Jesus *[continuing calmly and relentlessly]* It's a delicate and precarious balance, this system by which we feed the powers of this world, and they in turn allow us to exist. I imagine it must be hard to walk that line, day after day, between the power of Rome and the anger of your own people.

Matthew *[unnerved]* Who are you?

Jesus How many tax collectors have been killed or otherwise put out of business in the past year, through failing to keep that balance?

Matthew *[in wonder that Jesus apparently sees into his heart]* At least a dozen.

Jesus And yet you remain in the job. Why?

Woman Because of the obscene money he makes! You were just preaching about it!

Man Because he's been co-opted by Rome! He's an Israeli who hates his own people!

Matthew Because there's nothing else to be done!

Jesus What if I told you there was?

Matthew *[carefully]* I would say...you're entitled to your dreams.

Jesus Suppose you dreamed them with me. Just for a while. Isn't that something you've always longed to do?

Matthew *[suspiciously]* I won't deny I can get pretty sick of the status quo. But how long a "while" are we talking about? Could I return to my job afterward?

Jesus *[firmly]* No. *[less insistently]* At least, I doubt you'll be able to. Hope can only take you so far!

Matthew Then you're asking me to leave my whole world! And for what?

Jesus The possibility of a better one. Follow me, and let us see if we can bring it into being!

Scene 2

Daughter , Doctor , Jairus

{Meanwhile, in the town, Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, sits by the bed of his dying daughter.}

Jairus *[in the middle of telling her a story]* ...she followed the light deep into the wood, where it turned into a cottage that grew out of the biggest tree yet. "You must be the girl who is searching for the end of the rainbow," said the old woman who answered the door, and the girl remembered that, Yes, that was why she was there.

Daughter *[in a weak voice throughout]* Father?

Jairus Yes, dear.

Daughter It's a man, a rabbi.

Jairus All right. *[continuing in his storytelling voice]* "You must be the girl who is searching for the end of the rainbow," said the old rabbi who answered the door, and the girl -

Daughter *[interrupting]* His name is Joshua, and he's from Nazareth.

Jairus *[in surprise]* That's the name of the rabbi preaching outside the town right now! How did you know about him?

Daughter *[still in a weak voice, but more and more dreamily]* She follows the light deep into a wood...he opens the door...his name is Joshua...

Jairus All right, his name is Joshua. And he says, "You must be the girl who is searching for the end of the rainbow," and the girl remembers that, Yes -

Daughter *[urgently shrieking]* Joshua! Joshua! Son of the Most High! Come to me! Come to me!

Jairus *[in alarm]* Doctor! Doctor!

{The doctor enters.}

Doctor What's wrong?

Jairus She suddenly started screaming. About that visiting rabbi. Calling him by name!

Doctor *[in a soft voice as he examines her]* Leah? Leah? *[after a pause]* Well, she seems all right now. Could it have been a nightmare?

Jairus Maybe. Some of what she said was just gibberish. But when she called to him - I haven't heard her speak so clearly and strongly for months. She sounded wide awake and...and herself.

Doctor *[tenderly]* It's as I told you: she'll have her ups and downs, but the overall direction...the overall direction is unalterable.

Jairus I know, I know. But it was the first time in months she spoke so strongly. It was the first time she asked for something. *[after a pause]* Can you sit with her a while?

Doctor Of course. You go get some rest.

Jairus I'm going out to find this rabbi.

Doctor *[sympathetically]* Listen, I've heard the stories about his healing powers, too, but they're just stories. I understand that you have to try, but I just want to warn you not to expect -

Jairus No, that's not why I'm going. I know...I understand and accept the prognosis. I'm going because she asked for him. It may be the last thing she ever asks for, and I'm going to see that she gets it.

Scene 3

Joanna , Man , Peter , Woman

{Matthew throws a big party for Jesus, to which he invites all his friends.}

Man I can't believe this guy is letting himself be felled by this scum!

Joanna Really? Why not?

Woman Well, it's obvious! He claims to be a righteous man, but then he goes and parties with sinners!

Joanna I wasn't aware that working as a tax collector violated any religious laws.

Man They're worse than sinners! They're traitors!

Joanna You feel they do harm to the nation?

Man Of course! They do the Romans' dirty work for them. They bleed us dry to enrich our oppressors.

Joanna And if they were to suddenly quit their jobs like this Matthew fellow has...would we suddenly be free from that oppression?

{Peter enters.}

Peter Hey, what's happening? Some party, huh?

Woman I think it's a disgrace!

Peter Huh?

Joanna She disapproves of the company we're keeping.

Peter Well, I'm not crazy about it myself, but the rabbi says these are exactly the people he was sent to help.

Joanna What?

Peter Yeah, some Pharisees were given him flack for partying with this crowd, and he said he wasn't sent to those who were healthy, but to those who were sick. You know, like a doctor.

Man *[relenting]* I suppose I can see that, but still...

Woman This Matthew fellow is giving up his old ways at least.

Man *[feeling better]* True. And I suppose this rabbi is the one who turned him around.

Joanna Wait! Peter, he called the tax collectors and others here "sick"?

Peter Yup. He said the healthy don't need a doctor.

Joanna Did he say who the "healthy" were?

Woman Respectable people, of course! People who obey the laws and do good.

Man Priests, teachers, doctors...

Joanna Is that what the rabbi said?

Peter Actually, he didn't say anything about who the healthy were. Why? Who do you think they are?

Joanna I'm not sure they exist. Maybe the truly healthy are the ones who admit they're sick!

Scene 4

Jairus , Jesus , Joanna , Peter

{Jairus finds Jesus on the road.}

Jairus Rabbi! Rabbi! Are you Joshua of Nazareth?

Jesus I am.

Jairus I'm Jairus, a leader of the synagogue in town. My daughter is - is sick, and she wants to see you. Will you come?

Jesus Of course.

Jairus Thank you! Thank you so much!

Joanna Well, the people will approve of *this* visit a lot more!

Peter And wait 'til he heals the daughter! They're going to go nuts. *[to Jairus]* Hey, you, Jairus!

Joanna *[suddenly urgent]* Peter, no!

Peter What? I was just going to tell him he was in for some good news.

Joanna We can't promise him something like that! What if he doesn't heal her?

Peter Why wouldn't he?

Joanna Who knows? But we can't assume he will.

{Jairus comes over to them.}

Jairus Were you calling me?

Peter Uh, yeah. Uh...

Joanna We just wanted to say we're sorry about your daughter's illness. Is it serious?

Jairus *[suddenly somber]* Very.

Joanna *[getting it]* Ah. I'm sorry.

Jairus *[philosophically]* Everybody dies. The only question is when.

Peter *[jokingly]* Hey! I'm not planning to ever die!

Jairus *[wearily but affectionately]* Good for you, young man! *[sadly]* But it's not something anybody ever plans for. It's always...always a surprise.

Jesus *[in alarm]* Hey!

Peter *[springing into action]* Rabbi, what's wrong?

Jesus Somebody touched me!

Peter What?

Jesus *[sternly]* Somebody touched me! Who was it? Reveal yourself!

Joanna *[incredulously]* Rabbi, there's a crush of people here. Of course somebody touched you. Probably a dozen did.

Jesus I felt power go out of me. Who was it? I'm not angry. I just want to know. Please! Show yourself.

Scene 5

Jairus , Jesus , Messenger , Sick Woman , Woman

{The sick woman steps forward.}

Sick Woman *[fearfully]* It was me.

Jesus *[gently]* Ah, yes. Why did you do it?

Sick Woman I've been sick - for years now. Twelve years I've suffered from bleeding the doctors couldn't stop. But I heard about you, about your powers, and I knew you could heal me if you wanted. But the crowd was so thick, and I couldn't get your attention. Yet, I knew if I could just touch you, I would be healed. And I was! I can feel it.

Jairus Dear God! *[to Jesus]* You really can heal the sick!

Jesus Isn't that why you came to me?

Jairus No! I heard the stories, too, but I must confess, I didn't believe them.

Jesus You didn't have faith. *Her* faith has made her well. *[to the woman]* Go now, and be freed from your suffering!

Woman Thank you! Thank you!

Jairus *[to Jesus]* I don't know what to say. If you really have some power of healing, then my daughter -

{The messenger enters.}

Messenger *[interrupting]* Sir! Sir!

Jairus What are you doing here? What is it?

Messenger I'm sorry, sir. The doctor sent me after you, not twenty minutes after you left. She died in her sleep. The doctor said she went peacefully. She never woke up again after you left. Your face was the last face she saw.

Jairus *[breaking down in grief]* No! No...If I'd only believed the stories, and brought you there sooner!

Messenger What are you talking about?

Jairus This man, the rabbi Leah called for, he could have saved her. I know it now.

Messenger *[awkwardly and compassionately]* Sir, the doctor told you not to get your hopes up...

Jairus I'm telling you, he could have healed her! He healed this woman.

Sick Woman That's right! After I was sick for twelve years, and the doctors could do nothing.

Messenger *[to Jairus]* Did you see this "healing"? And are you she was really sick?

Sick Woman Everybody saw it! And they know me, too. Anybody can tell you how bad off I was!

Messenger *[backing off mildly]* Well, maybe so, then, but in any case, there's nothing he can do for Leah now. Come on, sir. Let's go home.

Jairus Wait. *[to Jesus]* Will you still come?

Jesus Of course.

Messenger But why? It's too late. Come on, let's go.

Jairus No! Leah wanted me to bring him to her, and that's what I'm going to do! No matter what.

Messenger Sir, you did your best to bring him in time. She won't even know he came.

Jesus Then I'll wake her.

Messenger What?

Jesus She's only sleeping, but I can wake her.

Jairus What are you saying?

Jesus Bring me to her, and I will wake her.

Messenger *[indignantly]* Okay, that's it! This man just lost his daughter, and you're joking around! *[to Jairus]* Come on, sir, this guy's a nut!

Jairus Wait! *[to Jesus]* Will you still come? I promised my daughter I'd bring you to her. *[to the messenger]* I don't care what he is!

Jesus Let's go.

Scene 6

Daughter , Jairus , Jesus , Matthew , Messenger

{At Jairus's house, Jesus sits by Leah's side talking to her.}

Messenger *[to Matthew]* This is ridiculous. It's a mockery of my master's grief! Can't you talk to your master and get him to back off?

Matthew I don't know; I've only been his follower for one day so far! But why would you want him to leave?

Messenger Isn't it obvious? The girl is dead. He was brought here to maybe deal with her illness, but now she's gone!

Jesus *[in a storytelling voice, as if continuing a story he had been telling all along]* ...So the girl entered the tunnel she found, that sloped down beneath the mountains.

Jairus *[in shock that's almost horror]* My God!

Messenger What is it? What's wrong?

Jairus That story!

Matthew Is that what it is? I don't understand it at all.

Jesus *[continuing the story]* The lower she descended, the sleepier she felt. Soon, she walked open-eyed through her own dreams.

Jairus *[in a stunned voice]* That's because he started it in the middle.

Matthew Really? What story is it? I don't recognize it.

Jairus *[in the same stunned voice]* That's because it's my story. I made it up!
It's the story I began telling her just this morning.

Messenger But - that's impossible!

Jesus *[continuing the story]* After a time that seemed endless, the way
began to rise, and her thoughts rose as well toward the light.
She came out into a bright valley, and there before her...was...

Daughter *[in a sleepy voice]* The end of the rainbow!

{The crowd goes crazy.}

Jairus Leah! Leah, you're - back!

Daughter *[in normal surprise, as if everything had always been fine]* Daddy!

Jairus My daughter!

Jesus *[to Jairus]* You can tell her the rest of the story.

Messenger This is - this is impossible!

Matthew He brought her back from the dead! It really is a new world!

Jesus It is indeed! *[in a sermonizing voice]* Earlier today, this former tax
collector was saved by nothing more than Hope, and on the
way to this house, a woman was saved by her Faith. And
behold! This leader of your synagogue is greater than either of
those, for he sought me out through Love. But be careful not to
put your new wine into old wineskins, for the old wineskins
have already stretched as far as they can, and will burst as the
new wine expands. Put your new wine into new wineskins, that
both might be preserved!

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