

The Women



Luke 7:36-8:3

Year C Proper 6

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲	
▲	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room	▲	
▲	Pharisee - the host of the banquet and the husband of Susanna; an open minded man within the limits of convention, but very nervous about his reputation	▲	
▲	Chuza - the open-minded, intellectually curious manager of Herod's household	▲	
▲	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	▲	▲
▲	Susanna - the more conventionally-minded friend of Joanna, who, like her friend, left her home to become a disciple		▲
▲	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

Chuza , James , Joanna , Peter , Pharisee

{James and Peter sit with Chuza and Joanna and some other guests at a party thrown by the Pharisee.}

James We're practically at the back of the room! It's like we're the kitchen help!

Peter *[calmly]* The head table was full.

James Full of other people. The rabbi is the guest of honor, and we're his followers. They should have made room.

Peter Take it easy. The food's just as good back here.

Pharisee *[coming over to the table anxiously]* Is everything all right?

Chuza You've outdone yourself, my friend.

Joanna Please tell Susanna for me that she's done a marvelous job.

Chuza And I can't believe you somehow got this Yeshua fellow to be the guest of honor! You know, Joanna and I and a few others have been quite interested in him of late, but only one of us has been able to hear him speak so far.

Pharisee I heard him speak twice to the crowds and knew I had to introduce him to our circle.

Joanna I wish Joseph had been able to come.

Chuza I must admit, I was not optimistic about this rabbi from what I'd heard about him, but his talk today was wonderful. It's rare to hear sermons that are so....so fresh in this day and age. Except for the subversive ones, of course. It's a bad sign when all the most vital voices in a society are the ones calling for revolution.

Peter *[blurting it out]* But that's exactly what the rabbi is doing!

James Peter!

Pharisee *[anxiously]* What's that?

Peter *[boldly declaring it]* He's come to renew the nation, to lead us to freedom!

Chuza *[thoughtfully probing]* By...defeating the Romans, for example?

Peter Yes! If necessary.

James Peter, shut up! You're going to get us arrested!

Peter What's the matter? Are you afraid to die?

James *[to the others]* We apologize. He doesn't know what he's saying. We're not a military group. The rabbi is a spiritual leader.

Pharisee *[fearfully defending himself]* Chuza, I promise you, there was nothing subversive in the sermons I heard. Otherwise, I would never have invited him!

Chuza *[calmly]* No blame on you, old friend. If this man were really a subversive, if he were *merely* a subversive, I doubt his two fine followers here could be so divided in their opinion of exactly what he is.

Pharisee I must go check on the other guests. *[to Peter and James]* Please keep such talk to yourselves. This is a respectable house!

Joanna So you're disciples of the rabbi.

James Yes, ma'am.

Joanna *[to Peter]* Is he right? Are you non-violent?

Peter *[still not afraid]* We've taken no *direct* action yet.

James The rabbi preaches peace and kindness, a new kingdom of men where the meek will rule.

Chuza *[with mock dismissal]* Really? He seemed so much more sensible earlier.

Peter *[rising from his seat]* You take that back!

James *[holding him back]* Peter! Calm down!

Joanna Chuza, stop teasing them! *[to James]* Don't worry, my husband is a good man. He won't turn you in for words you speak, or for disliking him. Even though he's the manager of Herod's house.

James *[stricken with fear]* Dear God!

Chuza *[dropping the joke and speaking sincerely]* My wife is correct. I really would like to know more about your rabbi. He must be a remarkable man to inspire such devoted followers.

Joanna But you really should be careful what you say around our host. He's a well-intentioned man, too, but he's in a much more delicate position. He's not quite on the ruling council, but close enough that he's under some scrutiny. His membership in a sort of social network we maintain is bad enough; now, he'll be connected with your rabbi, who's not looked on very favorably by the powers that be. Your talk about dying for your cause might get him actually killed.

James *[nervously]* That sort of thing doesn't really happen that often these days, does it?

Chuza It happens more often than you'd guess. More often than people know.

Peter Herod keeps his assassinations quiet, does he?

Joanna *[solemnly]* Yes, hidden from public sight, but known to those of us who serve him, who (one might say) help him to do the things he does.

Chuza *[consolingly]* Now, dear -

{But his comfort is interrupted by the frantic host.}

Pharisee *[running up to the table and addressing James and Peter while pointing to the head table]* Sirs! Sirs! Is that woman part of your following?

Peter What woman?

Pharisee *[anxiously]* Curse it, you can't see her from here. She got into the house somehow and went straight to the rabbi and practically...collapsed at his feet! And all she's done for the last ten minutes is cry and carry on and...and wipe his feet - with her hair! I sent some men over to remove her, but he waved them away. Is she another one of his followers?

James A woman? Impossible.

Joanna Look! There she is. He's speaking with her now.

Chuza Remarkable! I've never seen anything like it.

Peter James, it's her!

James Who?

Peter Don't you remember? From the last town? That woman? *[to the others]* She's no follower. She tried to get at the rabbi in the last town we were in, but the locals warned us she was a fallen woman.

Joanna A what?

Peter *[embarrassed to spell it out]* You know, a...um...uh

James My God, you're right! It's her. I can't believe she tailed us all the way here.

Pharisee Does your rabbi know who she is?

James No, we try to shield him from things like that, so he can focus on the work.

Pharisee You'd better tell him now. If he knew the kind of woman she was, he wouldn't be letting her...cling to him like that.

Peter You're right. I'll go. She knows my face. Maybe she'll leave as soon as she sees I'm on to her.

{Peter and the Pharisee exit.}

Joanna *[to Chuza in wonder]* I believe he knows perfectly well what she is.

Chuza I think you're right, dear. It's pretty obvious just from her appearance. Remarkable.

James *[misunderstanding them]* No, no! I assure you he doesn't. If he did, you can be certain he would have thrown her out himself! I must apologize, on behalf of all my comrades: we should have noticed she was following us, we should have been more alert...

Joanna *[to Chuza]* Look at his expression, how he's looking at her.

Chuza It's almost as if...*[silence while he stops himself from saying the unbelievable thing]*

Joanna Say it.

Chuza As if he loved her.

Joanna Remarkable.

{Peter and the Pharisee return.}

Chuza Well, I see you spoke with him, but the woman has not left your rabbi's side. What happened?

Pharisee *[in a bit of a daze]* I'm not sure.

Peter Before I had a chance to say anything, the rabbi called me over and said he had a story to tell me. Two men owed money to a moneylender, one a lot and one just a little, but neither one of them could pay him back, and he forgave them both. Then he asked me which debtor would be more grateful, and I said the one who had the biggest debt, of course. And then - and then he forgave the woman for her sins!

Joanna He claims to have the power to forgive sins?

Chuza *[suddenly concerned for the first time]* Only God can do that. Perhaps we'd better not invite him to any more parties, after all. The one man more dangerous than a subversive is a heretic!

Pharisee *[fearfully trying to defend his choice of a guest speaker]* Wait! He didn't say *he* forgave her, did he? He only said that her sins had been forgiven. There's nothing heretical in that, is there?

Peter Now I get it! He was explaining why she was gushing over him like that, why it was okay.

James But it wasn't okay! It was disgraceful. Honestly, I think the rabbi is just too soft sometimes.

Joanna You must be one of those debtors who owed just a little. That's very admirable.

James I don't know about that. I think we all owe the rabbi a great deal.

Chuza But my wife has a point. We all owe God everything, and yet, some of us would in fact get along just fine if it turned out He didn't exist. You two were fishermen, right? If your rabbi were to ascend into the heavens tomorrow, you'd have a decent life to return to. But think about this woman.

Pharisee *[frantic with fear]* Please, please, could we stop talking about sins being forgiven and God not existing?

Chuza You're quite right, old friend, we've been thoughtless guests. Bring us more of your excellent food and we promise we won't say another disturbing word!

Scene 2

Joanna , Mary , Susanna

{The party is over. Mary remains in a heap by the head table in the now empty room. Joanna and Susanna enter.}

Susanna *[kindly]* Welcome to my house.

Mary I'm sorry. I just had to speak to him. I'll go now.

Susanna Please, stay. Are you hungry?

Mary *[reluctantly]* I am.

Susanna Then sit. There's plenty of food left over, and I barely had a chance to eat, myself.

Joanna What's your name, dear?

Mary Mary.

Joanna Are you one of his followers?

Mary No! How could I be?

Susanna Why did you come, then?

Mary Three days ago, he healed me, but I didn't get a chance to thank him. I've tried to speak with him again, but...today was the first chance I had.

Susanna I've heard he's a marvelous healer. What did he cure you of?

Mary Everything! My life.

Joanna Tell me, is it true he declared your sins forgiven?

Mary Yes! They're gone, like a great weight lifted. He lifted them with a look.

Joanna Remarkable. I envy you. *[suddenly somber, almost to herself]* I wish I could have talked with him myself. We could all use some forgiveness.

Mary *[incredulously]* You, my lady?

Joanna My dear, the sins of the rich are much worse than the sins of the poor. The poor can generally only hurt one person at a time - and it's usually themselves! I have the blood of thousands on my hands.

Susanna Joanna! You shouldn't say things like that about yourself! You've *saved* thousands through your influence on Herod's court. You're not responsible for his sins.

Joanna It's a complicated world. *[to Mary]* But what will you do now?

Mary I don't know. I can't go back to my old life, but there's no way forward I can see to go, either.

Joanna Why not the path the rabbi walks?

Mary You mean follow him? I tried, but they turned me away.

Joanna But *he* didn't turn you away just now, did he? If you could get past those disciples of his, what do you think he would say?

Susanna *[snapping her fingers]* I have an idea. I'll be right back! *[She exits]*

Mary I think...I think he would accept my service. I can't imagine him turning anybody away.

Joanna *[suddenly thoughtful]* No, I can't either.

Mary But what about his other followers? Those - men. How will I get past them? *[Joanna, lost in thought, does not reply.]* My lady?

Susanna *[returning]* This should help! *[Hands her a box]*

{Mary opens the box and sees that it's filled with money.}

Mary I don't understand.

Susanna This is a donation I was planning to make to the rabbi's ministry, and now, you'll be my courier, but my instructions are that it can only be given to him directly. Do you understand?

Mary *[getting it after a pause]* They'll have to let me see him.

Susanna If they want the money!

Mary I don't know how I'll ever repay you.

Susanna Serve him well. And have a good life.

Mary Thank you - for everything.

Susanna Well, you'd best be on your way if you're going to catch up with him. Joanna, let's finish up here and then...Joanna?

Joanna *[coming out of her daze]* Will you give me a moment alone with Mary? I'll come to you in a minute.

Susanna Of course. *[to Mary]* God be with you on your road. *[exits]*

Joanna *[to Mary, after a long pause]* How do you do it?

Mary Do what, my lady?

Joanna *[struggling to define the thing she now feels herself being called to]* Give yourself over to...to whatever the next moment demands of you?

Mary I don't know. I don't think I have a choice.

Joanna And I have too many. Well, Mary, will you teach me?

Mary *Me teach you?* How?

Joanna Take me with you.

Mary My lady! You can't! You're...you're a respectable woman.

Joanna Respectability can be a heavy burden. I wonder: could he lift *it* as well with a look? Let's find out!

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