

Jerusalem



Luke 9:51-62
Year C Proper 8

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3
■	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	▲	▲	●
▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence	▲	●	▲
▲	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	■	▲	●
▲	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	▲	●	●
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲		▲
▲	Gatekeeper of a Samaritan city who's normally a nice person, but who is sick of the contempt in which the Israelis hold his people		▲	
●	Mary Magdalene - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past			▲
▲	Jesus			▲
▲	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

James , John , Judas , Matthew , Peter , Phillip

{James, Peter, Phillip, Matthew, and Judas are walking up the road toward the gate of a Samaritan city. They've been tasked to secure accommodations there for the night.}

James *[singing happily to the tune of the Lone Ranger theme]*
 We're going to Jerusalem,
 We're going to Jerusalem,
 We're going to Jerusalem,
 We're goooooooooo - ing to Jerusalem!

Peter You're in a good mood!

James I am! And why not? We're going to Jerusalem!
Everybody! *[but nobody joins him]*
We're going to Jerusalem,
We're going to Jerusalem...
Come'on!
We're going to Jerusalem --
[good naturedly] You guys suck!

Phillip I don't see what the big deal is. It's exciting to see the big cities,
but we've been there before.

James It's not about the tourism, Phillip. Jerusalem is the *center*. It's
where things happen. And I believe something big is about to
happen.

Judas What do you mean, "something big"?

James I believe the Day is approaching. Our day.

Matthew Do you mean the rabbi is going to declare himself? God grant the
day has truly come!

Phillip James, is it true? Is that what's happening?

James He will throw off the Roman yoke and rule a renewed nation.
And we with him.

Judas How do you know this? Did he say something to you?

James Not exactly...

Peter John, you're always having private talks with the rabbi. Has he
said anything to *you* about this?

John No, nothing.

Phillip So he hasn't said anything to anybody.

James Well, no, but I can just feel it! Can't you tell that something's
changed in him? He's...preparing, setting his sights. We skipped
meeting with two potential donors in the last week. Why?
Because we don't need any more money! Because our day has
come.

Matthew The Lord whom you seek shall suddenly come to his temple. Even the messenger of the Covenant, in whom you delight.

Peter Wait a minute, wait a minute. You believe all this because of a passing mood of the rabbi's? If that's the case, I'd say "our day" was coming just about every other week!

Judas John, what about it? You know him better than any of us. Is he preparing for the Day?

James What, you don't think I know him, too? I'm the elder brother. I joined him first. I spend just as much time with him as John, and if I say he's changed, you can believe it!

{An awkward pause.}

Phillip Sorry, James, but I want to hear it from John, too.

John *[after another long pause]* James is right. There's definitely a change, and not just a passing one. He's looking to Jerusalem. Something big is going to happen there. I feel it myself.

Matthew God be praised!

Peter Well, okay, that's great, but he should have told us. We don't even have any weapons.

Phillip Weapons?

Judas We won't really be using them ourselves, of course, but it might be good for symbolic purposes.

Peter Symbolic nothing! I intend to use mine plenty.

James That's crazy. We're going to be the leaders of the revolution, not the foot soldiers. It's going to take the whole population rising up, with us leading them.

Peter That's just what I'm saying. We'll be leading the fight.

Phillip But, but that's not the same as being at the front of the battle...is it?

Peter You're cowards! You're afraid to die for the rabbi!

James *[angrily]* I'll show you how afraid I am!

Judas Hold on! Break it up, you two!

Look, it's not about who's brave and who's not. No one doubts anybody's courage, okay? It's about strategy and tactics. The rabbi is everything. He *is* the revolution. And they'll know it. If he's killed or captured, it's all over. Right? So we need to protect him. We can't go running off to fight on our own. We need to stand between him and the people. Agreed?

{Nobody speaks for a while.}

Phillip John, you haven't said a word. What do *you* think?

John *[looking up out of a profound silence]* We're talking about armed conflict? About killing people?

{Another silence.}

James Well...we certainly hope it won't come to that, but it might.

Judas I'm hoping he'll win over the people simply by his ideas, so swiftly and thoroughly that the Romans won't know how to respond.

Peter Oh, they'll respond. And then we'll have to. I'm telling you, it's going to come down to a fight!

Phillip But if it does, we're going to stay out of it, right?

Matthew If it does, we'll do what we must.

James Matthew of all people is exactly right. Listen, little brother, that's the big question. Nobody wants a fight, but if following the rabbi means going to war, are you ready to do it?

John I just can't believe it could possibly come to that.

Judas We've all felt that way at one time or another. Every one of us has seen the rabbi do or say something that made us think he was crazy, and we've all had to set aside our qualms and accept him as our leader. Or everybody except you, it seems. You've always been closest to him; you've never been shocked by anything he did. But wouldn't it be strange if that went on forever? Maybe today is your day to finally have to die to yourself, like the rest of us.

Matthew "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord.

John *[after painful thought]* All right. I agree. I consent.

Scene 2

Gatekeeper , James , Judas , Matthew , Peter , Phillip

{The group has arrived at the town where they plan to spend the night.}

Phillip There's the gatekeeper. Let's ask him about accommodations.

Peter Ask him about buying some swords, too.

James We can wait and get them in Jerusalem.

Peter But I'm anxious to get some practice in. And we might need them on the road between here and Jerusalem.

James We need our money for the rooms tonight. We have donors in Jerusalem who can finance the weaponry.

Judas Actually, we have plenty in the treasury right now for both. And I bet they'll be cheaper here.

James *[impatiently]* Look, we just shouldn't get them here, okay?

Phillip Why not? What's wrong, James?

Matthew *[grimly]* These people are...unclean.

Peter What?

Judas We're on the Samaritan side of the border. That's a Samaritan town.

Phillip Samaritans! Are we safe here?

Peter Don't worry. We've whipped them before, you know. They won't make any trouble.

Matthew We shouldn't even be here. Let's go to the next town.

James We don't have any choice. The rabbi was very clear that we should book the rooms here. I can't imagine why.

Judas I have a guess. This town is on a direct line to Jerusalem. He wants to get there as quickly as possible.

{They all fall silent, contemplating the historic significance of the moment. No one speaks again until they reach the entrance of the town.}

Gatekeeper Welcome! Are you looking for rooms for the night?

Judas Yes, for fifteen all together. There are more on the way.

Gatekeeper That won't be a problem. The inn is completely vacant right now. Only one night?

Peter Yes, we'll be back on the road first thing tomorrow, as early as possible.

Gatekeeper Where are you headed? We get people coming through on their way to all kinds of places.

Phillip We're going to Jerusalem.

Gatekeeper *[suddenly serious]* Jerusalem? Why on earth would you want to go to that...wait, you're Israelis!

Matthew Of course we are!

Gatekeeper *[after a hard pause]* Then you'd better move along.

Judas Sir, we don't intend to make any trouble. We just need a place to stay, for one night.

Peter Don't apologize to the scum!

James Listen, we're on a critical mission, a mission of greater importance than you can imagine.

Gatekeeper That's what it always comes down to for you people, doesn't it? You think we're ignorant savages who couldn't possibly understand your "true religion." Well I've got news for you: we're the ones who kept the true religion alive while you were in captivity.

Matthew True religion? Pah! You're compromisers! Chasers after foreign gods, and the favor of the Romans!

Gatekeeper Are you rebels? Oh, my God! You're going up to Jerusalem to make trouble, aren't you? Get away from here at once, and never whisper to anybody that we talked! You fanatics are going to get us all killed! Go! Now!

{James, incensed, has to be held back, and then dragged off by the others.}

James *[yelling]* Fanatics? Killed? We're going to *save* you, despite yourselves!

Phillip James, come on, let's go.

James *[yelling even louder]* He will rule! And we will rule beside him! Then we'll see!

Peter Give it to him, brother!

James *[even louder]* A curse! A curse on your city!

Judas *[speaking quickly and urgently]* James, these people are in league with the Romans. There might even be Roman soldiers stationed here. Unless you want to face them right now, I suggest we leave in peace.

James *[one last jab]* The Day will come! The Day will come!

Scene 3

James , Jesus , Joanna , John , Judas , Mary , Matthew , Peter , Phillip

{The advance party meets up with Jesus and the others.}

Mary *[to Jesus]* But what about the third man?

Jesus No one, putting his hand to the plow but thinking back to the comfort of his farmhouse bed, is fit to serve the Kingdom.

Joanna But I think of my comfortable bed all the time!

Jesus Fear not. You'll remain faithful to the end.

Joanna *[with a laugh]* That's reassuring.

Mary *[seriously]* The End?

{The advance party returns.}

James Rabbi! Rabbi! It's an outrage!

Joanna What happened?

Peter They turned as away.

Mary Why?

Judas They found out we were on our way to Jerusalem.

Joanna Ah, I wondered if that would be a problem.

Matthew The Lord judges those who would thwart His will. They will not escape calamity.

James Exactly! Rabbi, when we come into power, we should punish that backward little dump.

Jesus How?

James I don't know. Double their taxes. Or make them our slaves. Or level their pitiful little town and build a new palace on the rubble.

Jesus What if we did that right now? What if I called down fire from heaven this very night to destroy them?

Judas You can do that?

Peter Of course he can! He's the Messiah! *[to Jesus]* Do it! Do it!

James Yes! They deserve it, and it will be a sign to all our enemies!

Jesus You want me to destroy the town this night? Every man, woman, and child? And you're all in agreement about this?

James Absolutely.

Jesus Even John? John, do you, too, ask me to do this?

John *[with difficulty]* If that's what must happen for the Kingdom to come, if that's what you must do in this world, then yes.

Jesus *[sighing]* It's late, and it seems we really do have no place to lay our heads. Let's go to the nearest Judean village for the night.

Judas That'll mean going backward quite a way. We'll be even further from Jerusalem.

Jesus Perhaps we aren't ready to enter those gates just yet.

{He exits, with Judas, James, and Peter trailing after him.}

James Rabbi, what's wrong?

Peter We're ready! We're ready!

{Only John, Phillip, Joanna, and Mary remain behind.}

- Joanna** I don't mind telling you my heart was in my throat when he talked about destroying that town.
- Phillip** I was afraid to speak a word.
- Mary** He was just testing us. He would never do something like that.
- John** I can't imagine it, anyway.
- Joanna** Your mission to the town appears to have been...eventful.
- Phillip** James got into an argument with the gatekeeper. It was actually kind of funny!
- John** How were things back here?
- Joanna** Uneventful. We packed up the camp and the rabbi told a story about a fig tree. Then we had some visitors wanting to join us, but he sent them all packing.
- Mary** I didn't understand why he wouldn't let the third man join us, but that first man was awful!
- Joanna** He basically wanted free room and board, and turned tail when the rabbi told him how poorly we live. The second man had a better excuse - he was still taking care of his elderly father - but the rabbi sent him away rather harshly. Now that I think about it, I'm a little surprised by how...judgmental he was.
- Mary** The third man just wanted to say goodbye to his parents first. He was going to come right back. I didn't understand that one at all.
- Phillip** Oh my God, I think I do! It was all about Jerusalem. We were going to be there soon, and then...well, we think some big things were going to happen. Maybe the rabbi didn't think there'd be time for the man to go home and then come right back.
- Joanna** John, what's this about? What's happening in Jerusalem?
- John** *[gloomily]* I'm not sure. But suddenly, I'm glad we're not going there straightway. I'm suddenly...not as anxious to see what the great Day we've waiting for for so long might bring.
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*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
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