

A house divided



*Matthew 12:22-32; Mark
3:20-35; Luke 11:14-23*

Year B Proper 5

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Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3	4
▲	Mary - the mother of 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	▲			
▲	James - one of Jesus' brothers	▲		▲	
▲	Peter - the most headstrong of the disciples (add John to this part)	▲			▲
▲	John - Jesus' favorite disciple (a super small part that should be combined with Peter)	▲			●
▲	Pharisee - an open minded Pharisee sent to observe Jesus		▲		▲
▲	Scribe - a scribe sent to gather incriminating evidence against Jesus		▲		▲
▲	Man - a man in the crowd		▲		
▲	Woman - a woman in the crowd		▲		
●	Simon - one of Jesus' brothers			▲	
●	Sister - one of Jesus' sisters			●	
▲	Jesus				▲

Scene 1

James , John , Judas , Mary , Peter

{Mary and James come to Judas and Peter before a public appearance by Jesus.}

Mary Sir, sir!

Judas Welcome! Have you come to hear the rabbi speak?

James *[belligerently]* We've come to take *Joshua* home!

Peter *[belligerently to James]* What are you, his keeper?

Mary *[quietly but firmly]* I'm his mother.

Peter *[suddenly gushing]* The rabbi's mother? It's an honor to meet you, ma'am!

Judas *[coolly to James]* So that would make you...

James His brother!

Peter *[half to himself]* He has a brother?

James *[belligerently]* You're damn right he does! Four! And two sisters. We're all here. All of us. To get him away from you people!

Judas *[still coolly]* Really?

Peter *[angrily]* What the hell do you mean by "you people"?

James I mean: you religious nuts! you cultists! you terrorists!

Mary *[beseechingly]* James, please! *[to Judas]* Please, sir. I understand you're good men trying to do a good work. But my son needs help. He's not in his right mind!

Peter *[almost speechless]* "Not in his right mind???"

Judas *[interrupting Peter in a polite voice]* We appreciate your concern, but may I ask what makes you think he's...troubled?

Mary *[despairingly]* Everybody's saying it! The priests, the scribes, even - even the neighbors, people who have known him all his life! Oh, I don't know what's happened to him!

James He was messed up by these scoundrels, that's what happened!

Peter *[threateningly]* You're about to get messed up by *this* scoundrel!

Judas *[quickly and calmly]* Peter? Could you go fetch John?

Peter *[still in fight mode]* What? You think I can't take this guy by myself?

Judas *[raising his voice just a bit]* Peter! Just go get John!

Peter *[grumbling]* All right, all right.

{Peter exits.}

Judas *[to Mary]* Sorry. He's...very devoted to your son.

Mary I can see that. I can see you are, too. So for his sake: please let me take him and get him some help!

Judas I'll be happy to do whatever needs to be done, but I just want to understand more clearly what your concerns are. Would that be all right?

James *[belligerently]* Our "concern" is that you're using my brother, who is the smartest, nicest guy you could ever meet, in order to start some kind of cult, or foment some kind of rebellion, and that you're going to get him killed! *Your* concern should be that we're going to bring the police - or the Romans - down on you!

Judas *[still cool]* "Smart" and "nice". *[to Mary]* Is that how you'd describe him, too?

Mary He was a wonderful child, kind and gentle, and so loving.

{John enters.}

Judas Your timing is perfect. Could you describe for these people what kind of person the rabbi is?

Mary John!

John Mary! Peter said someone was here trying to cause trouble.

Judas You know each other?

James Mother, who is this guy?

John We met at a wedding.

Mary *[distantly, as if distracted by some inner turmoil, for the rest of the scene]* In Cana.

James You mean cousin Simon's? That one where they surprised us by bringing out the best wine last?

Mary That was the one. That wedding. That wine.

John Who could forget it? "And a sword shall pierce your own heart also."

{Mary gasps and starts to cry.}

James *[outraged]* A sword shall pierce her heart??? What the hell kind of thing is that to say to a lady?

John *[instantly contrite]* I'm sorry, I was just - just remembering...

James Well, remember this: you haven't seen the last of us. We're reporting you to the authorities, and then we'll see who's pierced with swords! Come on, Ma. Come on!

{They exit.}

Judas What on earth was that about?

John They were the troublemakers?

Judas Yeah, they wanted to get the rabbi psychiatric help.

John *She* thought he was crazy?

Judas Yeah, poor thing. You can understand how a mother might feel, with her son claiming to be the Messiah and all. She just doesn't realize that he really might be!

John But - but she was there when he performed his first miracle, at that wedding we were talking about. In fact, she was the one who told him to do it!

Judas Wow. And what was that line you recited? About the sword?

John It was something she told *me*. That a priest had said to *her*. About how her son was going to be the Messiah!

Judas She remembered that. And yet, she's also apparently believes he's crazy! Amazing. The left hand can really not know what the right hand is doing, and two warring beliefs can really coexist in one mind!

Scene 2

Man , Pharisee , Scribe , Woman

{Members of the crowd talk among themselves as Jesus preaches and heals.}

Pharisee *[earnestly]* I still don't understand why we're here. And in our civilian clothes.

Scribe *[sternly]* To keep close watch on a dangerous man!

Pharisee *[with concern]* I didn't realize you considered him dangerous. What's your case against him?

Scribe *[impatiently]* We're building it now.

Pharisee But - then you don't have a case yet. How can you consider him dangerous until you've gathered all the facts?

Scribe *[sarcastically]* Sure, let's wait until *after* he brings ruin on the nation before prosecuting him!

Pharisee It's just that his sermon earlier seemed fine. Did you find some problem with it?

Scribe You haven't heard some of the others!

{The crowd suddenly erupts into cheers.}

Pharisee *[excitedly]* Did you see that? He just cured a man who couldn't speak!

Scribe *[incredulously]* He can't have!

Pharisee He just did!

Scribe It must have been a plant. Oldest trick in the book!

{A man and woman enter.}

Man No! That was no plant! That was a friend of mine, and he's been unable to speak for years. The whole neighborhood can vouch for that fact.

Woman And he healed my aunt who hasn't been able to walk for ages!

Pharisee Isn't all this proof that this man is of God?

Scribe No! Not necessarily.

Pharisee But he clearly has the power to heal!

Scribe So what? Just because a man has power doesn't mean he got it from God. There *are* other...forces in this world.

Man You mean...?

Pharisee [*suddenly somber*] I hadn't thought of that.

Woman Thought of what? What other forces?

Scribe The forces of Satan!

Man But - but why would Satan do good? Why would he cast out his own demons?

Scribe To trick us! To persuade us to follow the teachings of that servant of his! So that servant can lead us to Hell.

Pharisee [*thoughtfully*] Sometimes, even our own priests are unable to exorcise a demon. But it would be easy for their leader to.

Woman I think it's disgraceful that you're trying to attribute this man's good works to Satan! As a matter of fact, I don't even believe in any "prince of darkness".

Man You don't believe in Satan? I never knew that.

Pharisee [*kindly*] But you do believe in God, don't you?

Woman Of course!

Pharisee Then why one and not the other? If you can believe in an absolute spiritual being that's good, why not one that's evil?

Woman Because it's a horrible thought! I wouldn't want to live in a world where there was a Devil. Just look at what the idea is doing to us now: making us doubt the goodness of this man who's spoken such wonderful words and healed all these people.

Man [*warming to the conversation and waxing philosophical, until interrupted by the Scribe.*] You know, I've always thought that the -

Scribe [*ominously*] I think you had best cease this **heretical** talk! Both of you.

Pharisee *[half apologetically]* We're officials of the Temple.

{A sudden pall falls upon the conversation.}

Man *[after a pause]* Sorry! We didn't realize - what I mean is, we didn't know...

Pharisee *[diplomatically]* It's all right. It never hurts to discuss the possibilities. But how about if we focus our attention back on the man now? After all, that's why we came here, right? Look! I think he's about to try healing that blind man!

Scene 3

James , Mary , Simon , Sister

{Meanwhile, Jesus' family discusses the events of that morning.}

James *[angrily]* Those jerks! Those criminals! It was outrageous!

Simon But they didn't say we couldn't see him, did they?

James They might as well have. Talk, talk, talk! Questions and more questions. Like we had to pass a test in order to see our own kin!

Sister Mother, are you all right?

Mary *[as if in a trance]* "And a sword shall pierce your own heart also!"

Sister What? What do you mean?

James She's been like that ever since the confrontation. Some jerk said that to her. Can you imagine threatening an old woman like that?

Simon It seems strangely formal to be a threat. Are you sure that's what it was?

Sister Mother? Is that really what they said?

Mary *[distantly]* That was it. But long ago. Before the wedding. I tried to forget it. I tried to escape it!

Simon Who said it to you, and what does it mean? Is it something about Joshua?

Mary *[feeling it out slowly]* And us. Our fates. The world we live in. It's just that: the wine was such a good thing! I thought it would always be good, him performing wonders and the people celebrating and enjoying the gift. But then he wasn't able to heal anybody, and he began say things that got people upset, and all that talk about him being crazy. I began to see how the sword could fall - and I didn't want to believe it! It was better for him to be crazy!

James What on earth are you talking about?

Mary "On earth"! Listen: your brother Joshua, he's not...he's not all that he seems. He's...oh, I don't know how to say it!

Simon *[tenderly]* Mother? If you're trying to break the news to us that he was conceived out of wedlock, you don't have to. We did the math years ago, and we have no problem with it.

Mary Did you? My clever children! My good children.

Sister We love him, and we love you, and we're a family no matter what.

Mary Are we? *[laughing with joy through her tears]* Ha! But you don't know! *[coming to a decision]* He'll have to tell you himself. Find his disciples and ask them if we can see him. Not to take him away, but just to talk, to catch up.

James Mother, they're only going to stonewall us again.

Mary He won't let them. Go now, and have faith. Have faith in your brother!

Scene 4

Jesus , John , Peter , Pharisee , Scribe

{Jesus gets close to finishing his talk.}

Peter *[to Jesus]* Is that it, then? *[to the crowd]* Is there anyone else here who seeks healing? *[after a pause, during which no one speaks up]* Awesome! We ran the table!

Jesus There's just one more thing. *[to the crowd]* I have one more sermon to preach!

{The crowd cheers.}

Peter What a day! You're going to leave them more satisfied than any crowd we've had yet.

Jesus *[in preaching mode]* There are those among you believe my works are not of God!

{The crowd boos.}

Jesus There are those who would ascribe my power to the devil!

{The crowd boos.}

Peter Who'd do that? *[to the crowd]* Whoever said that, come say it to our faces!

Jesus They will not! For they are ruled by fear, and live by secret whisperings.

{The crowd boos.}

Peter It must be those priests! Or some pointy-headed scribe!

{The crowd laughs.}

Scribe Hey! You! You should not speak that way about your leaders.

Jesus *[coolly]* Sorry! We didn't realize you were a scribe without your official robes.

Peter I'll bet you're the ones who think the rabbi is of the devil!

{The crowd boos.}

Pharisee *[earnestly]* No! We are by no means certain, but it is our responsibility to make sure of it, one way or the other. We have to consider all the possibilities, for your protection.

Jesus A laudable goal. But tell me, how can Satan cast out Satan? If any kingdom, if any house, is divided against itself, how can it stand?

Peter You tell'em, rabbi!

Jesus No one can enter a strong man's house unless they first bind the man. And then they can plunder the house.

Peter That's ri - huh?

Pharisee What your master is suggesting is that, if Satan has possessed a man and therefore is in control of that "house", only an opposing and greater force, God, could bind him and liberate the house.

Scribe No, wait! That's not what he said! He said, "plunder" the house.

Jesus *[reasonably]* Hmmm. Perhaps I could have chosen better words. I suppose the strong man should be a robber or home invader, and the word should indeed have been "liberate".

Scribe But that's not what you said! What you said was a slip that revealed your true intentions: to plunder the souls of these good people!

{The crowd murmurs uneasily.}

Jesus *[suddenly harsh]* Beware! For truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, attributing to Satan the works of God, can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin!

{The crowd cheers again.}

Scribe We shall see who is the sinner, and who will not be forgiven!

{The scribe and pharisee exit. John enters.}

John Rabbi! Rabbi! Your mother - your whole family - they want to see you. *[to Peter]* Don't worry, they don't want to drag him away or anything like that. They just want to talk.

Jesus *[still a little harsh]* My mother? My family? Who is my mother? Who is my family? You are. And these people are. Whoever does the will of God is my family!

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