

To Prepare a Place



John 14:1-14, 15:1-8
Year A Easter 5 ; Year B
Easter 5

copyright © 2014
 Freeman Ng
 www.AuthorFreeman.com

Parts by scene

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

		1	2	3	4	5	6
▲	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	●		▲		▲	
▲	Thomas - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts	▲		▲		▲	
▲	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	▲		●		▲	
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	●		▲		▲	
▲	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		▲		▲		▲

Performance notes: If you don't have enough readers for all the parts, Judas can be read by everyone, as a kind of chorus. If you're performing this play in front of a congregation, perhaps the congregation could read the lines, which consist entirely of Psalm 80, in just the way it might recite the Sunday Psalm together. If an individual reads Judas's lines, he or she should try to invest as much emotion into them as possible, to show that Judas is doing what he's about to do out of a genuine love for the nation.

Scene 1

Jesus , Joanna , John , Peter , Phillip , Thomas

{The disciples, celebrating Passover with Jesus in a private room, are in an uproar because of Jesus' statement that he's going to be betrayed. Meanwhile, Peter is shaken over the fact that Jesus told him personally that he was going to deny him three times, and John over the fact that Jesus revealed to him that Judas is the traitor, but forbade him from sharing that knowledge.}

Peter *[in an urgent whisper]* Rabbi, we have to talk. We're not finished talking! Why are you ignoring me?

Phillip Rabbi, you're joking, right? Or testing us somehow.

Thomas When you say, "betray", do you mean active, intentional betrayal? Or do you mean that we might just let you down?

Peter *[desperately]* No one here's going to let you down! I swear it!

Joanna *[to John]* What's with Peter? *[in concerned tones]* You don't suppose...you don't think he might be the one the Rabbi suspects, do you?

John No! The traitor...can't be Peter. I just know it.

Joanna You have a suspect of your own!

John No, no! I...I had no suspicions.

Joanna *[indignantly]* You don't think this really is some kind of cruel joke or test, do you? Because if it is -

John *[interrupting]* No! It's real. I'm...I'm sure of that much. There *is* a traitor. I just...the rabbi just hasn't said who.

Thomas *[mustering his courage]* Rabbi, if one of us is destined to betray you, won't you please tell us who you suspect? Maybe this person...doesn't even realize he's the one, and he'd want to know. Maybe this person would just leave the group rather than risk messing things up.

Jesus You think it might be you, don't you?

Thomas *[in anguish]* I've tried to believe, I really have, but I just can't. And who knows what harm that might ultimately do to you or the group?

Jesus *[lovingly]* Thomas, your unbelief could never harm me or the group. You strengthen us! No, the one who will betray me is a true believer.

{Peter bolts up from his seat with an anguished cry, grabs his sword, and dashes over to Jesus. The next three speakers shout their lines more or less all at once.}

Peter Agggghhhhh!

Phillip It's him! Stop him!

John Peter, what are you doing?

Joanna Rabbi, look out!

Scene 2

Judas

{Judas makes his way through the streets, reciting a psalm (Psalm 80) that expresses his desire that Israel should be saved.}

Judas Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim,
shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might,
and come to save us!
Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
You have fed them with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
You make us the scorn of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.
Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Scene 3

Jesus , Joanna , John , Peter , Phillip , Thomas

{Back in the upper room, Peter stands over Jesus with sword in hand.}

Peter All right! Maybe it *is* me. I don't know how it could be, I would die fighting for you, but if I'm going to somehow cause you harm, then take me out now! Kill me! I'd rather die than hurt you.

{He offers his sword hilt-first to Jesus.}

Jesus [*gently*] Peter, everybody, please sit down. Don't let your hearts be troubled. If you believe in God, then believe also in me. In my father's house are many rooms, and I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again to take you back to be with me, though you already know the way.

Thomas But we don't even know where this place is. Or I don't, anyway. So how will I know the way?

Jesus *I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. And you know the Father and have seen him.*

Phillip Whoa. *I haven't. Seen the Father, I mean. Did I miss something? Could you show him to us again?*

Jesus Don't you know me after all this time? Haven't you seen me just about every day for the past three years? If you've seen me, than you've seen the Father. I am in the Father and the Father is in me. The words I speak come from him. The works I perform are his work.

{Jesus returns to his food, and the disciples go on talking among themselves.}

John *[privately to Peter]* Are you all right?

Peter Yeah. Sorry about scaring you. I kind of scared myself.

John Everybody in this room knows the traitor can't be you. You know that, right?

Peter *[suddenly a little angry]* Then who is it? How can he drop a bombshell like that and then wave it away like it's nothing?

John I don't know. Are we supposed to try stopping this traitor? And if not, why would he tell us about him in the first place?

Peter Well, it's not like he named him. *That* would have been weird! "Phillip here is going to betray me. Just thought I'd let you know."

John *[with deep anxiety]* Weird is right. Listen, be vigilant. *[awkwardly trying not to name Judas]* Maybe that's why he told us about - the traitor. Be vigilant...not just toward, toward the people in this room, but everybody. Everybody he might encounter, whether it's an outsider or, or one of us followers, or any of his other supporters out there in the world.

Peter *[showing John his sword]* This sword will not leave my hand, day or night, until we achieve the Kingdom.

{Meanwhile, another conversation around the table.}

Thomas Phillip, you looked a little disappointed at the rabbi's answer.

Phillip Yeah. I guess I suddenly got all excited to see God.

Joanna But the rabbi's answer was precisely that you *have*.

Phillip I know, I know, but I always imagined God as this sort of giant, with a deep voice, who thunders across the landscape, and throws lightning bolts, and parts the Red Sea.

Thomas That's exactly the kind of God I find it impossible to believe in! But the idea of the rabbi, just this person we know, walking through the world teaching and healing and just being who he is - even if he never did a single miracle: I could be persuaded that that person was God.

Joanna What I want to see is the *Logos*, the Mind behind all Creation. Sometimes, he comes close to calling himself that. Sometimes, he comes close to sounding like it.

{At that moment, Jesus belches.}

Joanna *[humorously]* And then the illusion is broken!

Jesus Pardon me! Doubly, in fact, because I couldn't help overhearing your conversation. Phillip, you would do better judging the size of a giant by its impact on the landscape of a soul, or by the light it casts into a mind! But I understand you, and I promise you this: whoever believes in me will be able to do not only what I've done, but even greater works, because I'm going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Phillip *[coyly]* What if I ask for real lightning and thunder?

Jesus Ask and you will receive! And Thomas: I can't promise you lightning and thunder like Phillip, but I will tell you this: the day is coming - sooner than anybody thinks! - when the only way to believe in me will be to believe in the impossible.

Thomas On that day, I'll do my best.

Jesus I know you will. And Joanna: I am indeed the Light that illumines every mind that comes into the world, but when the body is sick, there's only so much the mind can do.

Scene 4

Judas

{Judas walking through the streets continues his recitation of the psalm.}

Judas You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.
You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land.
The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches;
it sent out its branches to the sea,
and its shoots to the River.
Why then have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
The boar from the forest ravages it,
and all that move in the field feed on it.
Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
the stock that your right hand planted.
They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.

Scene 5

Jesus , Joanna , John , Peter , Phillip , Thomas

{The group has left the room and is walking through the city.}

Phillip *[to John]* Do you know where we're going?

John I have no idea.

Peter Probably the safehouse.

Thomas The what?

Peter The house near the tombs. The one that belongs to Joanna's friend.

Joanna It's empty and he's letting us use it as long as we'll be in town. *[to Peter]* But why did you call it a safehouse?

Peter Because nobody knows your friend is a secret follower of the rabbi's, right?

Joanna So far, yes.

Peter That means we can hide there if we need to, if things get dicey.

Joanna *[with dread]* You mean: when the fighting starts.

Peter Yup.

Phillip *[nervously]* I almost forgot why we were here! But do you really think it's going to come down to fighting?

John It might not at all! Let's not jump to conclusions. We don't know how the people will react to the rabbi's declaration, and how the Romans will react to that. We don't even know what he's going to do or say!

Thomas Actually, maybe he's been hinting at what's going to go down all night. Does anybody else feel like he's been talking to us as if he were going to leave us soon?

Peter That's ridiculous. He'd never leave us!

Joanna Maybe not, but Thomas is right: I've felt it, too.

Phillip What's he been saying that sounds like that? I don't get it.

John He said he was going to the Father, but that we could still ask for things "in his name". He said he was going to prepare a place for us, but that he would return to take us to be with him where he was.

Peter Could be part of the plan. Could be that we split up at first.

Phillip Or maybe he thinks the traitor is going to do him in.

Joanna How does he return from that, and why would we then want him to take back with him?

Thomas *[urgently]* Maybe the traitor is not a single person, and isn't going to kill him or get him killed. Maybe that's not what he means by "traitor" at all. Maybe the traitor is all of us! Maybe we've all let him down, and he's leaving us behind.

Peter How have we failed him? What have we done wrong? Nothing!

Joanna John, does it sound plausible to you? You know him better than any of us.

John I honestly don't know.

Thomas *[to Jesus]* Rabbi, some of us feel you've been talking like you're about to leave us. Have...have we all failed you as a group? Are we *all* the "traitor"?

Jesus There's a little traitor in everybody.

Phillip Except you, of course.

Jesus Especially me! The traitor within is always the greatest danger. Know that every temptation you'll ever have is one I might have felt as well, and every betrayal or denial one I might yet make.

John Does that mean we shouldn't be worrying about...the traitor you hinted at before?

Jesus I am the true vine, and my father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit; it is thrown away and withers, and then is cast into the fire and burned.

Joanna That's horrible!

Peter It's what the traitor deserves.

Jesus Abide in me as I abide in you, and you will bear fruit, for no branch can bear fruit unless it abides in the vine. Yet, every branch that bears fruit is still pruned to be make even more fruitful. If you abide in me, and let my words abide in you, you will ask for whatever you wish, and it will be given.

{A pause as everybody slowly realizes Jesus is done talking.}

Thomas Rabbi, I'm sorry to keep harping on this, but you're still sounding like you're leaving us.

Jesus *[darkly after a pause, and half to himself]* Before the vine can grow, it must be planted in the ground.

Scene 6

Judas

{Back to Judas in the streets.}

Judas But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.
Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at
www.WineskinProject.net/blog/mansions*

Copyright © 2014 by Freeman Ng and the Wineskin Project

Freeman Ng is a writer, poet, and Google software engineer living in Oakland, California. He's also the author of:

- *Joan* - a novelization of the life of Joan of Arc
- *Who Am I?* - a personalizable picture book
- *Haiku Diem* - a daily haiku feed that's been going since July, 2010

www.AuthorFreeman.com