

WITNESSES

A Stage Play about the Sermon on  
the Mount

by  
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## Why Produce this Play?

This play has a lot in it: laughter, tears, violence, action, audience participation, and room for theatrical interpretation. It is also not finished and won't be until it is performed and I can work on rewrites with the actors.

The play is an actor's play. It works for both inexperienced players and more polished ones. The play's characters are themselves inexperienced actors. However, since the players take dozens of parts, their roles have a lot of range.

The play-within-a-play is both familiar and completely new. It is based on a new word-by-word translation of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. However, those words will be mostly unfamiliar to audiences. See the appendix on Jesus's words to learn why. This is a new view on very proven material.

The Jesus we meet here is an entertainer. His words are full of humor, wordplay, crazy exaggerations, and even rhymes. His routine is not a sermon but an improvisation, working with his audience. Each character portrays their own version of Jesus and those with whom he interacts. The humor here was originally spoken. Like any stand-up routine, 80% of the funny evaporates when simply reading the words. The humor is in the inflections, the pauses, the movements, and the repetition. We have to hear and see the material performed in a funny way to get the jokes.

If a speaker today began his talk by saying, "Lucky...those paraplegics", we would immediately know it was a joke. This is exactly how Jesus begins this "sermon", saying, "Lucky...those beggars". Religious interpretation destroys this humor by rendering it into the more proper "Blessed are the poor." This play returns the material to its original funny form.

Personally, I am a multiple award-winning author, with no experience in play writing. My book awards have been for my non-fiction work, including the translation of ancient languages, which is the source of this work.



Gary Gagliardi, translator and playwright

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

TAMAR        The organizer of the group, a middle-aged Judean woman with a wealthy father living in Tiberias. She was an skeptical, unmarried spinster at the time of the Sermon.

EZRA         A grey-hair leader of a community in a Judean sect called the Observers (the Essenes). He worked as a manuscript copyist in the small community until his vision grew too weak to copy text.

DEMAS        A middle-aged Judean trained as a lawyer but coming from a family of tradesmen. He is a new member of the Distinguished class. He also lives in Tiberias. Demas sees himself as a realist.

ULLA         An older, outspoken fisher woman. She is widowed, grey-haired. She lives in the fishing village. She provide the perspective of a working person who has led a full life.

FESTUS       A thin, young Greek, from a wealthy family in Decapolis, the non-Judean cities of the Galilee region. He has some experience in the theater. He spent his life as an aimless young person before the Sermon.

PISCA        A young woman from a shepherd tribe. She was a child and an outcast at the time of the Sermon. She is both playful and shy.

## SETTING

The setting is an assembly of early Christians in outside of Judea, like Tyre, a Phoenician city, The audience is Greek-speaking but not Judean, though some may be from Judean backgrounds. The players work both from the "stage" in front of the room and from the "audience".

## TIME

The witnesses are speaking approximately seven years after the resurrection of Christ.

## PROPS

A SASH, bread BASKET, a dozen loaves of PITA, a WINESKIN, a PILLOW, a FLOWER, large DOLL, PENNIES, ANIMAL SKIN, a SHIRT, a STONE, CLOTH, VIAL OF OIL, a TOY SNAKE.

ACT I

SCENE 1

AT RISE                    A darkened stage with a center spotlight.  
The six characters stand in the shadows  
behind the light.

TAMAR

*(Steps into the LIGHT, holding  
the SASH.)*

Thank you for inviting us as witnesses to your assembly. My name is Tamar. I'm from Tiberias, the largest city on the Sea of Galilee. Like our other five witnesses, I heard the Teacher speak as what has become known as the Sermon on the Mount. As the Teacher grew more famous, people asked me and my father, who was there with me, to describe what it was like. As more assemblies of followers formed after his passing, we were asked more and more frequently to bear witness to what we saw. As we traveled, we met others who were also at the Sermon. The first was Ezra.

EZRA

*(Steps forward into LIGHT.)*

When I first met Tamar and her father, I was the leader of a small religious community. Tamar spoke at an assembly of followers near us. Since her father was ill, she asked for someone to read the lines of the sermon while she described what happened. I volunteered, but, since I too had witnessed the Sermon, I added my testimony to hers. Since Tamar's father had grown too weak to travel with her, he asked if I would accompany her so she could continue traveling and testifying. He offered a generous donation to our community if I did. I agreed. And soon, we met Demas.

DEMAS

*(Steps out.)*

Thank you, Ezra. I was sent out to investigate the growing movement of the Followers of the Nazarene. I was sent as a member of a group that we call the

## DEMAS (cont.)

Distinguished. In our language, the word for distinguished is "pharisee". I met Tamar and Ezra at a Follower assembly. Since I was also at the sermon, I saw that I could serve my mission more easily by traveling with them as another witness as they toured among Follower groups. Though they knew that I was a lawyer of the Distinguished, they thought I could add a valuable perspective. Then, we met Ulla.

## ULLA

*(Steps out.)*

I was a fishwife, a widow, and a grandma. Hearing Tamar's group brought back memories of hearing the Teacher speak. During their testimony, I added many things they had missed. Tamar was a rich, city girl. Demas and Ezra both scholars. The crowd that day was made up of working people like me. After the meeting, Tamar asked if I could join them to provide my perspective. Since she is rich, she offered to pay for my travel. Since I am poor, I agreed. Eventually, we encountered Festus who was also traveling. He said we were giving our testimony all wrong.

## FESTUS

*(Steps out.)*

When I saw the Master, his performance was thrilling. But the way that Ulla, Tamar, and the rest gave their testimony? Just boring. Endless description. No action. When we met, I was traveling with a theater group. My name is Festus, by the way. I am not a Judean, but a Greek, though I too grew up in Gallilee, on the Hellenistic side. I had learned enough about drama to show Tamar's group a better way to capture the experience. I asked if I could work with them. At first, I expected to stay with them only for a few months, but now here we are, years later.

## DEMAS

Festus's idea was that we should re-create the event, playing it instead of describing it. We put our different memories together with the Nazarene's words to construct a version of everything that happened there, that day.

TAMAR

And one of the most unique experiences on that day comes from our latest member, Pisca.

FESTUS

*(Brings PISCA out.)*

Pisca was just a child at the time of the sermon and not much more than one now.

PISCA

*(Sticks out her tongue at FESTUS but curtsies shyly to the audience.)*

Hi. I am Pisca. I grew up in a shepherding tribe. That day I was also one of the special "lucky ones". My mother and I both were, I mean. The lucky ones, that is. Sorry, I am not used to talking to groups. I'll just shut up now.

TAMAR

Relax, Pisca. In addition to re-creating the event, we also try to answer the questions that people usually have. One of the first things people ask is, "What did the Teacher look like?" Ezra, can you start?

EZRA

The Nazarene was an every man. Neither old nor young. Average height and weight. Neither dark nor light. Simple clothes, neither rich nor poor. Certainly, not wearing a brightly colored sash. Hair and beard midway between the longer hair of the country and the trimmed hair of the city. No distinctive features except for how expressive his face was and how nimble he was. Not old and creaky like Ulla and I.

ULLA

Speak for yourself, old man! But what impressed us all was his personality more than his looks. Especially his cheerfulness and confidence.

PISCA

And how much he liked people. Every time someone asked him a question, he was so happy to hear from them. Even people like Demas, who was his enemy then, but has since become a very nice person.

DEMAS

Not really his enemy, Pisca. It was just my job.

FESTUS

The Nazarene could be whatever the moment required, as authoritative as a ruler and as playful as a child. And always surprising. Always entertaining. Never just saying a word when he could act it out.

EZRA

Reading the Nazarene's words, you might think he was giving prepared remarks, but very little of it seemed prepared. It was all inspired by what happened there, what people asked and events like birds flying overhead.

DEMAS

He was so quick! He paid attention to everything and everyone.

FESTUS

None of us can really capture the Nazarene, so we take turns reciting his words and imitating his actions.

ULLA

What we lack in skill, we make up for in numbers.

TAMAR

*(Holds up the SASH.)*

Since we take turns reciting the Teacher's words, Festus's first idea was this brightly colored sash. When we wear it, we are speaking the Teacher's words, not our own, and acting as he did. We switch wearing that sash between parts of the sermon.

DEMAS

We will also take turns explaining what was happening as the Master spoke, asking the kind of questions he was asked, and making the comments that the crowd made.

EZRA

These questions and comments are not the exact words, like the words we have for the Nazarene, but only what we can remember.

ULLA

Yes, Ezra, but close enough.

PISCA

And all of you get to pretend along, that you are the crowd that we had there.

DEMAS

For example, we will lead you in applauding when the people there applauded.

PISCA

And with the chanting and the laughing.

FESTUS

Chanting, yes, as you will all see. But we can't force you to laugh. Humor doesn't always translate.

PISCA

But we laughed a lot that day!

TAMAR

Yes, Pisca, and we hope everyone here will laugh as well. People who hear us also ask about our personal opinions about the Teacher both before the Sermon and after. This is a good time to talk about our different reasons for going to see him. Demas, do you want to start?

DEMAS

My reason was simple. I was sent by my boss. My feelings about the Nazarene followed the views of the Distinguished. He was a menace and possibly insane. Ulla?

ULLA

I had no interest in the Teacher before I saw him. I was dragged there by my family. Our village was close, or I wouldn't have gone. Since the death of my husband, I had been feeling old, and sad, and tired of life. One of my sons is quite religious and thought it might help me to hear him. Pisca?

PISCA

My reason was simple as well. My mother had heard he was a healer so she took me to see him. Festus?

FESTUS

My case was simple as well. I was with some rich Judean friends who had a nice boat. We were sailing to various places on the Galilee. They thought the gathering might be fun. They were bringing wine. So naturally, I followed. As far as my opinion of the Nazarene? I'd never heard of him before. Ezra?

EZRA

As the leader of a religious community, it was my responsibility to listen to new important teachers, so I could provide guidance for my people. Over all my years, I had seen several popular figures rise and fall, so I was skeptical. Tamar?

TAMAR

I was skeptical as well. My father was the one who wanted to see the man speak. In general, I wasn't much interested in philosophy as he was, but I was curious. Mostly, I had heard that the Teacher was a strange type of character who said very odd things.

ULLA

Seeing him didn't change that impression at all! He was strange and odd.

TAMAR

Perhaps, but let us save the discussions about our feelings about him afterward. When you have all heard about what took place there, that day. For now, let us start by describing the scene.

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 2

AT RISE                      FESTUS is center stage with others to the sides.

FESTUS

Seven Springs is a lush rolling area on a hillside. It is watered by seven streams that flow from the hills into the sea. The sea would be on your right. Scrubby bushes dot the landscape.

ULLA

And rocks and wildflowers. The area is well-known as a meeting site. For many days, the Teacher's heralds had been spreading the word that the Teacher would be speaking there. We showed up by boat and foot, mule and wagon, excited to hear him. Hundreds of people of all types.

DEMAS

I arrived early with a guard named Boaz. Our job was to save some good seats for a group of the Distinguished with whom I was a new member. The Distinguished expect to get the best seats at meetings. I paid some beggars, widows, and orphans to hold this area right up front with Boaz watching them.

*(DEMAS indicates the front of the audience on the right).*

TAMAR

The day was warm but overcast. People arrived steadily, sitting down, filling up the hillsides around the flat speaking area.

EZRA

We sat in our groups. Galileans, sitting with others from their towns and clans. Judeans from nearer Jerusalem, and a number of other ethnic groups as well.

FESTUS

Many wealthy sat up front. They sent out their servants early to save them places. But people of all types arrived early and saved places for others.

*(FESTUS goes into the audience.)*

ULLA

The area was large, but, as it filled up, it got crowded.

TAMAR

A murmur moved among us as the Teacher arrived, mingling with the people. I was cynical about what we had come to see, but I felt everyone's excitement as he appeared.

PISCA

One of the Master's heralds saw my mother and me standing off at a distance from everyone else. Instead of chasing us away, as we expected, he brought us to a place behind the speaking area, separated from the crowd.

*(PISCA indicates a back corner of the stage.)*

ULLA

As the Teacher came in, we all strained to get a look at him. Then, the chanting started.

*(ULLA goes into the audience.)*

THE CAST

*(Chants quietly and slowly.)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.

What? The realm of the skies!

Change your minds! It has gotten near.

What? The realm of the skies!

EZRA

It was the slogan of another teacher, John, the Nazarene's cousin. The Nazarene had adopted it. His students and followers started the chant. As he walked alone out into the speaking area, the Master pointed up and twirled his finger at every chorus of "the realm of the skies."

*(EZRA puts on the SASH, points upward twirling his finger before every chorus.)*

THE CAST

*(More loudly, encouraging the audience to join.)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!  
Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!  
Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

TAMAR

The Nazarene signalled the chant to stop. And immediately, one of the beggars holding spaces for the Distinguished called out.

FESTUS

*(Calls from the Distinguished section.)*

Charity for the poor!

EZRA

*(Smiles and indicates FESTUS.)*

**Lucky! Those beggars!**

TAMAR

That shocked some but got others chuckling. The idea of beggars being lucky! The blind, lame, and crippled! It had to be a joke. He said it cheerfully, not cruelly.

DEMAS

One of those who thought it was cruel called out.

ULLA

*(Calls from audience, cynically)*

How can beggars be lucky?

EZRA

*(Closes his eyes and takes a deep breath and says happily.)*

**For the breath of life!**

ULLA

*(Calls out from audience)*

But why do they have such difficult lives?

EZRA

**Because theirs is: the realm of the skies!**  
*(EZRA points a twirling finger to the sky.)*

THE REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

PISCA

*(Claps from her corner.)*

I applauded the idea. People like my mother and I had difficult lives. The Master offered us a purpose, a goal.

DEMAS

Then the Master moved toward a group of widows. Also saving places for my Distinguished.

EZRA

*(Speaks sympathetically.)*

**Lucky! Those weeping in mourning!**

TAMAR

More surprise and more laughter. Was he joking? Again, some were offended.

ULLA

*(Calls from the audience)*

How is losing a loved one lucky?

EZRA

**Because, they themselves are going to be called near.**  
*(Pointing up.)*

THE REST OF THE CAST

*(Encouraging the audience to join, chants.)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

PISCA

*(Claps from her corner)*

And we again applauded. It was making a kind of sense.

ULLA

*(Explains from the audience.)*

Suddenly, a little girl rushed out of the crowd toward the Teacher!

*(ULLA shows the DOLL to the audience and runs it up the aisle toward EZRA.)*

TAMAR

The Nazarene was delighted and many of us laughed at the child and her parents trying to catch her.

EZRA

*(Picks up the DOLL, smiling.)*

**Lucky! The soft ones!**

*(EZRA pinches the DOLL's cheek.)*

TAMAR

The child giggled and more of us laughed.

DEMAS

And as was quickly becoming the pattern, several people in the crowd asked why.

ULLA and FESTUS

*(Call out from the audience, separately)*

Why? Yes, why lucky?

EZRA

**Because they themselves are going to inherit...**

FESTUS

*(Interrupts from the audience)*

The realm of the skies?

PISCA

*(Claps happily.)*

Many of us laughed and applauded the man's guess.

EZRA

*(Smiling but shaking his head no, handing the DOLL back to ULLA)*

**The mother earth!**

TAMAR

We laughed because he said it as though it was obvious.  
Children get the earth when we go to the skies.

DEMAS

The Nazarene then moved toward some rich Romans who  
brought baskets of bread and bags of wine for their  
outing. A Roman woman offered him a piece.

*(ULLA from the left front of the  
audience with a BASKET, offers a  
PITA to EZRA.)*

EZRA

*(Takes the PITA and holds it up.)*

**Lucky, those hungering!**

*(Bites off a chunk and chews  
zestily.)*

TAMAR

He said it with such gusto that we laughed again. Not  
just "hungry" but "hungering".

DEMAS

Then one of the Romans handed the Nazarene a wineskin.

*(FESTUS from the left front  
of the audience hands EZRA a  
WINESKIN)*

EZRA

*(Toasts the audience.)*

**And thirsting!**

*(Squirts wine into his mouth.)*

PISCA

We again laughed. But someone wasn't pleased. They called  
out.

ULLA

*(Calls from in audience.)*

What do those rich Romans hunger and thirst for? Our  
blood?

DEMAS

Which got both laughter and some cheers of agreement.

EZRA

*(Smiles, shakes his head no,  
indicates himself, and speaks  
confidently.)*

**For this justice!**

DEMAS

Many again asked "why".

ULLA and FESTUS

*(Call out from audience.)*

Why? Why Justice

EZRA

*(Smiles confidently.)*

**Because they themselves? They are going to get their fill.**

TAMAR

This drew the first big laugh from the crowd. Again of surprise. Then the Teacher pointed to the sky.

THE REST OF THE CAST

*(Encourages the audience and  
chants.)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.

What? The realm of the skies!

DEMAS

Then, the Roman women started breaking up their bread and passing some to the widows, children, and beggars near them.

*(ULLA passes out bread.)*

EZRA

*(Happily, indicates ULLA.)*

**Lucky, the merciful!**

DEMAS

Which triggered more "why's".

ULLA and FESTUS  
*(From audience, encouraging  
audience to join.)*

Why? Why lucky?

EZRA  
**Because they themselves are going to receive mercy.**  
*(EZRA points to the sky.)*

THE REST OF THE CAST  
*(Chants and encourages the  
audience.)*  
Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

TAMAR  
More of us were joining the chorus.

PISCA  
We laughed and applauded ourselves as we did.

TAMAR  
This is when the Teacher moved toward our own Pisca, just  
a girl at the time, with her mother.  
*(TAMAR assumes the position of  
Pisca's mother.)*

PISCA  
*(Shyly moves to the back of the  
stage.)*  
We were hidden here because we were unclean outcasts.

DEMAS  
As we noticed the two, we could see their skin sores.  
Word spread through the crowd, "unclean". The mood had  
been getting jolly, but now?

FESTUS  
*(Calls from the audience)*  
Unclean! An unclean woman! An unclean child!

*(EZRA holds out his hands to help TAMAR and PISCA stand. TAMAR has put a PILLOW under her robe, emulating a pregnancy.)*

TAMAR

The crowd gasped, noticing that the unclean woman was pregnant.

DEMAS

The word that they were unclean was still spreading, but the Nazarene had touched them. Shock! He continued to hold their hands! Horror? The Nazarene spoke over the crowd's murmurs.

EZRA

**Lucky! The spotless!**

TAMAR

Some laughed from surprise. Others in derision. Still others shushed them. It was sad. Tragic.

DEMAS

And some were angry. The unclean are forbidden to come near people, much less a gathering like that one.

FESTUS

*(Calls from the audience, angrily.)*

How are they spotless?

EZRA

**By this heart!**

DEMAS

The answer was confusing. Did his heart see them as pure?

TAMAR

Or did he mean that they were going to be purified by his heart. We had heard that the Teacher was a healer. Were we seeing a healing? The crowd grew quieter.

EZRA

*(Says happily and tenderly)*

**For they themselves?**

*(EZRA touches TAMAR'S PILLOW to indicate the unborn baby.)*

**The Divine...they will behold!**

PISCA

*(Chokes up)*

The tenderness in his voice. His eyes. His words. His touch. I cannot describe it. My mother and I started crying.

TAMAR

*(Leaves her role as PISCA'S mother, removes PILLOW, and speaks.)*

And we saw them crying and were moved as well.

DEMAS

Moved in many different directions. Not everyone was sympathetic.

TAMAR

But many were, especially we women. We saw birth as a vision of the Divine. But it was so sad: an unclean child born to an unclean mother. Some had hoped to see a healing.

DEMAS

But there was no healing. We could still see the sores. The crowd was torn. The polite thing was to ignore the unfortunate, but the Nazarene was congratulating them. It was surprising, amusing, but strange.

TAMAR

Remember, most weren't followers. Some, like me, came as skeptics, but most were just curious. And some came because they were trouble makers, looking for an opportunity. The Teacher gave them one.

DEMAS

In Judea, political and religious zealotry are mixed together. Being friendly with Romans? Touching the

unclean? Plenty of reason to get upset.

TAMAR

And many were drinking on the warm afternoon. The result was that, though the Nazarene had just begun speaking, some began heckling him.

ULLA

*(Calls from the audience.)*

They'd really be lucky if you could heal them!

FESTUS

*(Calls out from the audience.)*

I'd be lucky if your Roman friends passed me some of that wine!

ULLA

*(Calls out from the audience.)*

Or removed their swords from our necks

DEMAS

Others called out worse. We were surprised that the Nazarene didn't respond. Instead, he seemed amused. And waiting. He looked expectantly at us in the crowd. He seemed to be silently asking if we wanted to hear him.

TAMAR

And, since most of us had come to hear the man speak, many, mostly women tried shushing the hecklers.

ULLA

*(Calls from the audience.)*

Shush! Let him speak!

FESTUS

*(Calls from the audience.)*

Oh, shush yourself!

TAMAR

But as the hecklers kept it up, several men, military, guards, including the big guard Boaz with Demas stood up to support the women.

DEMAS

*(Steps into the audience, and  
speaks firmly.)*

Silence! We all came to hear the man speak!

PISCA

As the men confronted them, especially big Boaz up front,  
the hecklers shut up.

EZRA

*(Smiles and applauds)*

**Lucky! The peacemakers!**

*(EZRA gestures toward DEMAS)*

ULLA and FESTUS

*(Calls from audience, applauding,  
and encourages audience to join.)*

Yes, but why? Why

EZRA

**Because their true selves? Sons of the Divine!**

*(EZRA applauds.)*

TAMAR

We followed his lead and applauded the peacemakers among  
us.

*(CAST encourages the audience to  
applaud.)*

EZRA

*(Holding up hands for quiet.)*

**They are going to be called.**

*(Pointing upward.)*

THE REST OF THE CAST

*(Chants cheerfully)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

PISCA

We laughed and applauded.

DEMAS

*(Returns to stage, clapping)*

Most of us appreciated the peacemakers among us. Boaz was very happy with the praise.

TAMAR

And one of the groups that stood as peacemakers were the ascetics, followers of John.

PISCA

Their wearing animal skins make them easy to spot.

FESTUS

*(From audience, puts on an ANIMAL SKIN.)*

Those proud drunkards shall be trodden down!

DEMAS

It was a quote from Isaiah. John, the head of the ascetics, used it to speak against drinking.

EZRA

*(Gestures toward FESTUS)*

**Lucky! The ones harassing themselves for the sake of virtue.**

TAMAR

And we all laughed. The ascetics are an object of fun because they don't eat bread, drink wine, or wear woven cloth. Harassing themselves indeed! But again the crowd asked its "whys".

ULLA and FESTUS

*(Call from audience.)*

Why? Why?

EZRA

*(Gestures toward FESTUS and says triumphantly.)*

**Because theirs is: the realm of the skies!**

TAMAR

And we laughed. After all, the line was originally John's. We knew that. As we laughed, the Teacher pointed up!

*(EZRA's points at the sky.)*

THE REST OF THE CAST  
*(Encourages the audience to join  
chant.)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

EZRA

**Lucky are you all!**

*(Makes a broad right-hand gesture  
indicating the audience and  
applauds them.)*

TAMAR

We applauded ourselves readily enough.

DEMAS

Then someone called out.

ULLA

*(Calls out from the audience.)*

Are we lucky when we are called fools for listening to  
you?

EZRA

**When they chide you and harass you and proclaim every  
worthless thing against you!**

PISCA

Some chuckled nervously at that.

FESTUS

*(Calls out from the audience.)*

Are they lying about you?

EZRA

*(Laughs and shakes his head.)*

**Lying to themselves!**

DEMAS

Which triggered more "why's".

ULLA and FESTUS  
(Call out from the audience.)

Why? Why?

EZRA  
(Touches his chest.)

**On account of me.**

ULLA  
(Calls from the audience.)

What should we do?

EZRA  
(Says, encouraging people to  
clap.)

**Rejoice and celebrate!**

PISCA  
(Claps)

His happiness was infectious. He was turning around the crowd. But still some asked "why".

ULLA and FESTUS  
(Call from the audience.)

Why? Why?

EZRA  
**Because massive is that payment of yours:**  
(Pauses and smiles.)

**In the skies!**  
(EZRA points up.)

THE REST OF THE CAST  
Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

DEMAS  
And we applauded and cheered our own chanting.  
(THE REST OF THE CAST claps and  
cheers.)

FESTUS  
(Asks from the audience)  
But why are people harassed simply for listening to you?

EZRA

**Like this? Because they probably would have harassed the luminaries:**

*(Makes a gesture including all the audience.)*

**Those just like you!**

PISCA

And we laughed at our being called luminaries, who were the most revered men of our history.

DEMAS

And the Nazarene pointed to the sky again.

*(EZRA points to the sky.)*

THE REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 3

AT RISE                      EZRA removes the SASH and passes it to  
TAMAR.

FESTUS

For those of us there, it was a pretty exciting first few minutes. We laughed. We cried. We almost had a fight.

ULLA

And we were excited to hear more. The words and ideas were strange and new.

TAMAR

And we were participating more. Calling out questions, making comments.

DEMAS

Many things were called out from the crowd, but the Nazarene picked what he responded to. Those are the only ones we recreate.

TAMAR

People always ask us about the repeated phrase, "realm of the skies". What does it mean?

ULLA

We all heard it in our own way, and in different ways at different times. Both the Teacher and this John used the phrase. Maybe it meant they were touched by the Divine. Maybe it meant they were crazy.

DEMAS

Some of us were critical of the Nazarene. We heard the phrase as meaningless.

PISCA

I found it full of hope and exciting.

EZRA

Over the years, I have collected many stories that he used to explain "the realm", but at Seven Springs every idea went back to it, like water to the sea.

*(EZRA goes into audience.)*

FESTUS

It was a tool. A dramatic tool like the chorus in a Greek play. He made all of us into the chorus. It didn't need explanation because it was the explanation.

DEMAS

The concept was detailed logically. A home for those who suffer to which we are summoned by death, where justice is done and kindness and sacrifice rewarded.

PISCA

As a child, I didn't over think it like some people. It was felt. Hope. Happiness. Healing.

TAMAR

Though I too was a skeptic, I could trust that a change of mind was possible, perhaps necessary.

ULLA

For you? We don't pretend to know what it can mean.

TAMAR

*(Putting the SASH over PISCA's head.)*

And now our newest member, Pisca, will play the Teacher's part. It requires a lot of playfulness.

*(TAMAR goes into audience.)*

ULLA

And a little silliness.

PISCA

*(Points to the audience.)*

**You yourselves!**

*(Smiling mischievously)*

**You are the salt of the earth!**

*(Tapping her temple knowingly.)*

DEMAS

Among Galileans, an old "salt" is one with practical wisdom.

ULLA

*(Claps, happily)*

We applauded. We see ourselves as a salty people. Then someone shouted out.

EZRA

*(From the audience)*

But your critics are learned, and, distinguished.

TAMAR

*(From the audience)*

Doesn't that make their common sense, their salt, more seasoned than ours?

FESTUS

We laughed at the play on words.

PISCA

**But what if that salt is:**

*(Smiling and shrugging)*

**Insipid?**

ULLA

Another play on words and we laughed more.

PISCA

*(Thoughtfully)*

**In what should it be taken,**

*(Pinching her fingers together)*

**With a grain of salt?**

FESTUS

More laughter.

PISCA

*(Throws her hands up in the air)*

**In nothing, it is worth nothing. Except being tossed out.**

*(Playfully making a motion of tossing out the trash)*

**And being walked on by people.**

*(Demonstrating tramping around.)*

DEMAS

The Nazarene's clowning made many, especially the children, laugh. The more laughed, the more exaggerated his actions. Many gestures, like that "throwing out the trash" motion and tramping around, would be used over and over, becoming funnier the more they were repeated.

FESTUS

Thanks for explaining the humor. That should kill it.

PISCA

**You yourselves are:**

*(Indicating the whole audience.)*

**The light of this society.**

ULLA

We applauded ourselves. Our crowd was always happy to applaud ourselves.

PISCA

**It really doesn't have the power,**

*(Gesturing toward the audience)*

**a civilization,**

*(Putting her finger to her lips)*

**To be kept secret,**

*(Playfully)*

**Sitting on a hill!**

*(Sitting down.)*

FESTUS

We laughed. We were sitting on a hill!

ULLA

At that point, the sun came out momentarily from behind the clouds.

*(The LIGHTS brighten on the stage.)*

PISCA

*(Jumping up.)*

**Nor do they light up**

*(Indicating the sun as if holding up a lamp)*

PISCA (cont.)

**A lamp!**

ULLA

Then a small cloud darkened the sun again.

PISCA

*(Pretending to hold the sun/lamp  
in both hands.)*

**And put it beneath—**

*(Looking around, grabbing a  
bread BASKET from the front of  
the stage and pretending to put  
her imaginary lamp under it.)*

**A bushel basket!**

*(Tapping her forehead knowingly.)*

**Instead, up...on...**

*(Reaching upward toward the  
sun, going onto her toes, and  
teetering.)*

FESTUS

As the Master teetered there, we giggled. What was he doing?

DEMAS

Waiting for the cloud to pass. It did. The sun reappeared.

PISCA

*(Indicates the sun.)*

**A lamp stand! And it lights up everyone in the house!**

*(Indicating the audience)*

**In this way,**

*(Indicating the sun.)*

**It must shine, that light of yours**

*(Indicating the audience)*

**In front of other people.**

FESTUS

The sun was dazzling after the overcast.

PISCA

*(Shields her eyes and gazes into  
the audience)*

**So that they might see, your beautiful deeds!**

*(Gesturing toward the crowd.)*

DEMAS

He indicated the crowd. As we looked around, we all  
looked resplendent in the bright light.

PISCA

**And recognize that Father of yours: the one in the skies!**

*(Pointing upward.)*

THE REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.

What? The realm of the skies!

*(PISCA points upward again.)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.

What? The realm of the skies!

DEMAS

And then more clouds rolled in and the sun went away as  
fast as it came.

ULLA

*(Ominously)*

And, just as suddenly, the light mood of the crowd  
changed as well.

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 4

AT RISE                      PISCA passes the SASH to FESTUS. *DEMAS, EZRA, and PISCA go into the audience.*

FESTUS

People also ask why the words that we recite are different than the Master's sayings they've heard. Tamar can explain.

TAMAR

As I said, I am from Tiberias, the capital of the province of Galilee. Quintus Figuli is the official court recorder there. My father hired Quintus to come with us that day and record what the Teacher said. Thanks to my father's foresight, from the first time we described the event to others, we had a complete record of the Teacher's spoken words.

ULLA

Different versions capture the gist of what the Master said, but not his actual words. Many are changed so they can be more easily understood when read, but his words were spoken, not written.

FESTUS

Which brings us back to our scene, the mood changed because the Distinguished arrived. The ones Demas had been waiting for. They were late.

ULLA

Their arrival cast a pall over the good mood. Why? Because they are the Judean people's very own, self-appointed morality police.

TAMAR

The Distinguished have become a powerful part of our communities. At first, I didn't notice any Distinguished there, which was surprising. Then this group came down the aisle.

*(DEMAS, EZRA, and PISCA noisily make their way up the right aisle.)*

FESTUS

Almost immediately, the Distinguished leaders called out to the Master. The first was a younger man names Simeon, who becomes important later in our story.

DEMAS

*(Coming up the aisle.)*

We know about the nonsense you teach!

FESTUS

Another was a local elder, known as Johanon, who was our own Demas's boss.

TAMAR

And his prospective father-in-law!

EZRA

*(Angrily.)*

Why do you scoff at that wisdom of our luminaries?

FESTUS

But there were several others as well, many of whom would play a part in the event.

PISCA

*(Whining.)*

Why tear up our traditional laws?

FESTUS

*(Puts on the SASH and speaks cheerfully.)*

**You all might not want to assume that I have shown up to tear up the law!**

*(Holding up a round of PITA bread.)*

**Or the luminaries.**

*(Indicating the audience.)*

TAMAR

At this point, the Teacher gave a signal to his followers. They responded with a different chant.

REST OF CAST

Not upon bread alone is he going to live, a man, but  
though every saying pouring out from the mouth of God.

TAMAR

A quote from one of the oldest Judean books of law.

FESTUS

**I really haven't shown up to tear up:**

*(Tearing off another piece of  
bread.)*

**But to fill up!**

*(Putting the pieces of bread in  
his mouth and chewing.)*

ULLA

I'm sure Demas could explain comparing bread with the  
law, but I just laughed. He said that he wasn't tearing up  
when he was tearing up then filling up.

TAMAR

The Distinguished chased off Demas's beggars and widows  
to claim their places. They didn't seem happy with the  
Teacher's joke.

DEMAS

*(From the front, right audience,  
the Distinguished section.)*

Your clowning means nothing to the timeless law!

TAMAR

Then Johanon questioned him again.

EZRA

*(From the Distinguished section.)*

Why should anyone listen to you?

FESTUS

*(Nods, putting his hand over his  
heart.)*

**Honestly? Because I'm talking to you.**

ULLA

I laughed. He was so happy to answer their criticism.

PISCA

*(From the Distinguished section.)*

The law will survive your nonsense. It will survive as long as the sky and the earth!

FESTUS

**While, possibly, it just might pass away...**

DEMAS

*(From the Distinguished section,  
angrily.)*

The law? Your saying that the Law might pass away!

TAMAR

Interrupting the Teacher was always a mistake.

ULLA

But his pauses invited interruption.

FESTUS

*(Shakes his head no and gesturing  
toward sky and earth.)*

**The sky...also the earth.**

ULLA

This got another laugh.

TAMAR

And as more of us laughed, the Distinguished got angrier, calling out another challenge.

DEMAS

*(From the audience.)*

We know the law! We make sure our people dot each 'i' and cross each 't' in obeying it.

FESTUS

*(Dots an "i" writing in the air)*

**An 'i'? One?**

*(Crossing a "t" in the air.)*

**Or a jot?**

ULLA

We giggled.

FESTUS

*(Speaking with certainty.)*

**Never is 'it'**

*(Writing an "i" and a "t" in the air.)*

**Going to pass out of the law!**

TAMAR

Even the most serious of us couldn't help but laugh.

ULLA

Even some of the Distinguished chuckled.

FESTUS

**Until, possibly, "it"**

*(Holding up a piece of bread when he says "it" and then popping it into his mouth.)*

**Becomes**

*(Chewing, swallowing and patting his belly happily.)*

**Everything!**

ULLA

We laughed. Though there was probably some deep meaning there too.

TAMAR

And relaxed about the Distinguished. The Teacher seemed happy to have them. Then someone else, not one of the Distinguished, called out a question.

PISCA

*(From the audience.)*

Master, some say that we can undo our small obligations under the law by giving gifts at the temple.

TAMAR

We all knew that the "some" who say that are the Distinguished.

FESTUS

**Who might really undo one...**

*(Holding up one of his fingers.)*

**Of these laws?**

*(Holding up the bread.)*

**The tiniest?**

*(Holding up his little finger.)*

**And he might teach the people this?**

*(Shaking his head.)*

**The tiniest,**

*(Turning his little finger so it points out and wiggling it.)*

**He is going to be called.**

ULLA

Everyone laughed. The gesture is a common Judean insult to the, uh, abundance, of someone's manhood.

TAMAR

I couldn't believe that he did it. This was clearly not the type of religious teacher I was so skeptical about.

ULLA

He had to wait until the laughter died before finishing.

FESTUS

*(Still holding out his little finger and wiggling it.)*

**In the realm of the skies!**

*(FESTUS points upward.)*

THE REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

ULLA

And that made it funnier.

FESTUS

**The one, however, who produces**

*(Holding up the PITA.)*

**And teaches this? The greatest,**

*(Spreading his hands wide.)*

**He is going to be called: in the realm of the skies!**

*(Pointing upward)*

THE REST OF THE CAST  
Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

DEMAS  
*(From the Distinguished section.)*  
Are you telling us to ignore the teachings of our  
religious writers, lawyers, and authorities?

FESTUS  
**What am I telling you all?**  
*(Scratching his chin.)*  
**The fact is that unless you each individually**  
*(Holding up one finger.)*  
**Are superior to all of you,**  
*(Indicating the crowd.)*  
**This virtue,**  
*(Holding up the bread.)*  
**Surpassing that of the writers and Distinguished?**  
*(Indicating DEMAS)*  
**Never ever are you getting into...**  
*(Pausing)*  
**The realm of the skies!**  
*(Pointing to the sky)*

THE REST OF THE CAST  
Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!  
*(FESTUS points upward again.)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

TAMAR  
As you might expect, this direct attack did little to  
calm the Distinguished.

(FADE TO BLACK)  
(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 5

AT RISE                      The SASH passes from FESTUS to ULLA.

EZRA

As I said, I have been collecting the Nazarene's quotes. Many remember the Nazarene saying similar things to what was said as Seven Springs, but under different circumstances. And, apparently, he had a number of hostile encounters with the Distinguished.

DEMAS

The Nazarene's challenge to the Distinguished had a huge impact on me. My father had made sacrifices so I could be educated by the Distinguished and become one of them, moving up in our society.

*(Going into the audience.)*

FESTUS

In Judea, the academics, writers, and lawyers of the Distinguished have woven themselves into the social fabric. Very different than Roman society where the powerful are those of deeds not words.

ULLA

Even in small fishing villages, like mine, we have our Distinguished.

PISCA

And among the herding tribes like mine.

TAMAR

And certainly in the cities where the Distinguished hold the places of honor, sitting on city councils and courts.

FESTUS

Which brings us back to that day and the Master saying that our virtue must surpass that of the Distinguished to enter his realm of the skies.

ULLA

The Distinguished didn't want to hear it. One of their elders called out a challenge.

DEMAS

*(From the Distinguished section)*

You attack our virtue, but we hold to the ancient law.  
How can you put your foolishness against these ancient  
proclamations.

ULLA

*(Puts on the SASH.)*

**At some time, you have heard that it was proclaimed by  
the ancients...**

*(ULLA pretends to unroll a scroll  
and speaks in a slow, quavery  
voice, made to sound older than  
her own.)*

**You might not want to kill.**

*(Wagging her finger at the crowd  
while speaking uncertainly.)*

**Someone who, however, might possibly kill is going to—.**

*(Pausing as if searching for a  
word. Finding it, she continues  
more loudly raising a hand of  
authority.)*

**Bind himself by that decision!**

PISCA

We laughed at the voice. The first of many funny voices!

FESTUS

And we laughed at the weakness of the threat.

ULLA

*(Returns to her normal speaking  
voice and touches her chest  
modestly. )*

**I, myself? However?**

PISCA

He said "myself" humbly.

EZRA

Or maybe in a mock pompous way. I chuckled.

ULLA

*(Smiles)*

**I tell you that everyone being irritated by his brother...**

*(Indicating everyone in the crowd  
and then including herself.)*

**Is going to...**

*(Switching to the quavering  
voice.)*

**Bind himself by that decision!**

TAMAR

We all laughed.

FESTUS

The same as the punishment for murder. Just for getting irritated!

ULLA

**Who, however, might possibly say to that brother of his,**

*(In a funny voice.)*

**"You rag!"**

TAMAR

Among Galileans, a "rag" is someone in ragged clothing, a beggar. or miser, or simply a slob.

FESTUS

A local insult. I embarrassed my brother because I was a "rag", dressing like a local rather than a Greek.

ULLA

*(In her quavery voice)*

**Is going to...**

*(Raising her hand in authority)*

**Bind himself to...**

*(Pausing and smiling.)*

**The town council.**

FESTUS

We laughed louder.

*(FESTUS goes into the audience)*

PISCA

Because, to the councils, all us common folk are "rags".

DEMAS

And councils always include the Distinguished.

ULLA

*(Thoughtfully in her normal voice.)*

**Someone, however, who might possibly say,**

*(ULLA changes her voice to that of a fool.)*

**"You fool!"**

TAMAR

That kept us laughing. Some Distinguished call everyone who lacks their learning, "Fools".

ULLA

*(In her own voice)*

**He is going to bind himself...**

**Into that Gehenna of the fire!**

*(Gesturing throwing trash onto a fire. Then she dusts her hands off and makes a face and holds her nose.)*

PISCA

Again, everyone laughed.

DEMAS

Except the Distinguished.

*(DEMAS goes into the audience)*

TAMAR

"The Gehenna" is the trash dump outside of Jerusalem. Everyone in Judea and Galilee has heard of it.

PISCA

*(Holding her nose)*

And knows that the place stinks.

TAMAR

Before the Distinguished could respond, another question came from the crowd.

FESTUS

*(From the audience, using a nervous voice.)*

Can offering gifts at the temple make up for my offenses against a brother?

TAMAR

To the Distinguished, offering gifts at the temple cleans up many different mistakes.

ULLA

*(Invites FESTUS to come to the stage.)*

**If you present a gift on the altar, do you make amends for yourself?**

*(Pretending to hold a gift in a stately walk and then addressing FESTUS again.)*

**You might be reminded—**

*(Tapping her forehead knowingly.)*

**That your brother has something against you. Drop it off there, that gift of yours, in front of the altar.**

*(Pretending to put the gift down, bowing to the altar, and turning around.)*

**And take off!**

*(Pretending to run.)*

**First, settle with that brother of yours.**

*(Hugging FESTUS.)*

**And then coming back, offer the gift!**

*(Pretending to pick up her gift and taking it to the altar, bowing low.)*

PISCA

*(Claps her hands)*

We applauded.

TAMAR

Most of us laughed as the Nazarene dismissed the man, again, with a hug. Amid the applause another man shouted out.

*(FESTUS goes back into the audience.)*

EZRA  
*(From the audience, shouting.)*  
But my brother is taking me to court!

ULLA  
*(Summons EZRA to come onto the stage, and speaking to him.)*  
**Get friendly...**

EZRA  
*(Runs quickly up to the stage and interrupting)*  
With the judge?

ULLA  
**With that complainant of yours, Speedy!**

TAMAR  
And this won more laughter from the crowd.

EZRA  
Why get friendly with him? He's suing me!

ULLA  
*(Puts her arm around EZRA and indicating a path before them)*  
**Until you get together with him in this way forward.**

EZRA  
We've been friends, brothers, but he gets mad at me, some times.

ULLA  
**He shouldn't want...**  
*(Shaking her head.)*  
**At any time...**

*(EZRA joins her in shaking his head vehemently.)*

ULLA (cont.)

**To turn you over to the judge.**

*(Tugging the shoulder of her tunic up and pulling it as if she was being dragged somewhere)*

**And the judge to the officer.**

*(Tugging her tunic in another direction.)*

**And, into a cell, getting tossed.**

*(Making a throwing out the trash motion, and throwing herself forward toward the audience.)*

TAMAR

And of course, we laughed.

PISCA

*(Claps)*

And clapped.

ULLA

*(Grips imaginary bars, stares sadly out at the audience, puts one hand to her heart.)*

**Honestly I'm telling you.**

*(Speaking to EZRA.)*

**Never are you getting out of there, until possibly...**

*(Searching her clothing)*

**You have turned over...**

*(Holding up a PENNY.)*

**Your last penny!**

*(Kissing the PENNY good-bye, tossing it toward EZRA. EZRA catches it. ULLA gives him and hug and send him back into the audience.)*

PISCA

We all laughed and applauded.

TAMAR

The Nazarene could bring people out of the crowd and get them to play along.

PISCA

He made you feel special being near him. He seemed so happy to meet you and so sympathetic about your problems.

TAMAR

And that made the Distinguished shy about calling out more challenges to him, at least for the moment. This was where our own Festus and his drunken friends started making jokes.

PISCA

He claims he doesn't remember it all that clearly, but he is speaking his own words here as we remember them.

EZRA

*(Drunkenly.)*

My last penny went to wine!

PISCA

We laughed.

DEMAS

*(Drunkenly and sadly.)*

My last penny went to my wife!

ULLA

*(Removes the SASH.)*

That got more laughter. I and the other women applauded.  
*(Clapping.)*

FESTUS

*(Drunkenly and suggestively.)*

My last penny went to a woman...

*(Outlining a shapely woman in the air with his hands.)*

Who wasn't my wife but somebody else's.

*(Putting a finger to his lips and making shushing sounds.)*

ULLA

And that got the biggest laugh.

TAMAR

And it got some hisses. But most of us wondered how the Teacher would respond. Sex is a dangerous topic.

EZRA

And as if to dramatized the tension, another dark cloud passed over the sun.

PISCA

In the gloom, the Master seemed sterner and less light-hearted.

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 6

AT RISE                      The SASH passes from ULLA to DEMAS.

PISCA

This is one of my favorite parts of our testimony. During it, not one but three of our little group here got their chance to speak with the Master.

ULLA

The Teacher heard Festus's joke. He didn't take adultery lightly, but he also didn't take the boy seriously.

DEMAS

*(Holds the SASH.)*

Under Judean law, sleeping with another man's wife is as serious as murder. The Distinguished were hoping the Nazarene would slip up. Joking about infidelity is touchy. Maybe he would take infidelity too lightly like some ethnic groups do. Or too seriously and appear prudish. In real life, people cheat, but it also ruins lives and families.

FESTUS

First, in my defense, I was drunk and really young. Second, I am not Judean. And third, Judean law isn't like modern, civilized laws, the decisions of men, enforced by the state and its courts.

EZRA

The traditions we Judeans follow are not man-made. They are divine.

*(EZRA goes into the audience.)*

ULLA

For us, the law of tradition is a special way of life, a gift of the Divine.

PISCA

As children, we learn that we are separated from the everyday world and ordinary people by our traditions.

EZRA

The Distinguished, however, teach that our traditional ways aren't enough. They found a long list of obligations in the written law, a list so complex that we need their legal help to guide us through them.

*(EZRA goes into the Audience.)*

TAMAR

But some ideas are still simple, like that of the need for complete trust in marriage.

DEMAS

*(Puts on the SASH and speaks thoughtfully.)*

**You have heard that it has been said...**

*(Pretending to unroll a scroll and using an old man's voice sternly.)*

**You don't want to defile a woman!**

ULLA

Some chuckled at the voice.

TAMAR

Others shushed them. I was among the shushers. I was surprised by how this topic upset me. Among us, only married women can commit adultery. I guess I had grown bitter at not being married.

DEMAS

*(Touches his chest and smiles)*

**I, myself, however?**

TAMAR

He paused, smiling, and we waited to see where he would go.

DEMAS

**I am telling you all, that everyone gazing at...**

*(Turning his head and pointing as if to someone walking by.)*

**A woman!**

DEMAS (cont.)

*(Drawing a curved figure in the air.)*

**To the point of getting hot about her?**

*(Pulling open his collar and fanning himself.)*

ULLA

We all laughed.

TAMAR

Well, the Teacher was neither a prude nor an innocent. Men can get excited by a woman's looks. And women, even married ones, I suppose, can like exciting them.

DEMAS

*(Smiles and shakes his head sadly.)*

**He has already defiled her...**

*(Touching his own heart.)*

**In that heart of his.**

TAMAR

For some reason, this made me sad.

ULLA

Some young men and boys tittered, but most of us took his words seriously.

TAMAR

But one of Festus's drunk friends wasn't done.

EZRA

*(Drunkenly, in the audience.)*

When it comes to pretty women, my right eye has a heart of its own!

ULLA

We laughed. It was true! Men are funny that way.

TAMAR

The Nazarene again spoke directly to the drunk friend, not to the rest of us.

DEMAS

**If, however, that eye Of yours: the right one?**

*(Pointing to his own eye.)*

*(From the audience, EZRA nods drunkenly, points at his eye, and takes a step toward the stage, stumbling.)*

TAMAR

We laughed at the man's stumble.

DEMAS

**Trips you up!**

ULLA

We laughed harder.

DEMAS

*(Happily.)*

**Pluck it out!**

*(Pretending to tug his eye out, holding it up, and wagging his finger at it accusingly.)*

**And toss it away from you!**

*(Performing the throwing-out-the-trash motion.)*

**Because it helps you: when it destroys itself, one of your...**

*(Searching for the right word, holding up his hand with his little finger extended.)*

**Members!**

ULLA

We laughed.

TAMAR

I groaned.

PISCA

I blushed. I caught on to what that gesture meant.

DEMAS

**And you don't want your whole body...**

*(Indicating his whole body.)*

**Being tossed into Gehenna!**

*(Making the throwing-out-the-trash motion again.)*

ULLA

We laughed harder.

TAMAR

Not deterred, our clever Festus jumped in again.

FESTUS

*(From the audience.)*

My little member isn't bothered by my right eye, but by my right hand here!

*(FESTUS raises his right hand and arm in a pumping motion.)*

TAMAR

More of us groaned.

ULLA

But many more of us laughed.

*(ULLA goes into the audience.)*

PISCA

I blushed.

DEMAS

*(Looks up to heaven and shakes his head, and speaks directly to Festus.)*

**And so: if that right of yours, your hand?**

*(FESTUS holds up his hand and takes a step toward the stage and stumbles.)*

PISCA

We laughed at the stumble, but Festus claims he stumbled on purpose as a joke, copying his friend.

DEMAS

**Trips you up.**

*(Holding out his right forearm  
and chopping it with his left  
hand.)*

**Lop it off!**

*(Folding his arm under and  
waving his elbow as though he  
has chopped off his arm.)*

**And toss it away!**

*(Repeating his tossing-out-the-  
trash motion with one hand.)*

**Because, it helps you when it destroys itself: one of  
your...**

*(Unfolding his right arm and  
holding up his hand.)*

**Members!**

PISCA

And we laughed.

DEMAS

**And you don't want that whole body of yours.**

*(Indicating FESTUS's whole body.)*

**Into a trash heap it gets tossed!**

*(Again making the throwing-out-  
the-trash motion. )*

PISCA

Everyone laughed and cheered.

TAMAR

And at this point, our own Ulla called out from the  
crowd]!

ULLA

*(From the audience)*

So you are saying that he should divorce his hand?

TAMAR

Ulla got a good laugh as well. One of the Distinguished  
elders saw this joke as an opening.

EZRA

*(From the Distinguished section)*

See? Your antics encourage people to mock the law! Moses's law about divorce is sacred!

TAMAR

The crowd quieted, waiting for the Master to respond.

DEMAS

*(Switches to his old man's voice  
and gesturing toward FESTUS.)*

**So, it has been proclaimed!**

*(Pretending to unroll a scroll  
and reading in an old man voice.)*

**Whoever possibly might turn away that wife of his, let him give her a divorce notice.**

*(Returning to his regular voice,  
touching a hand to his chest)*

**I myself, however?**

PISCA

He said it differently every time, but it always got a laugh.

DEMAS

**I am telling you all: that everyone turning loose that wife of his?**

*(Shaking his head.)*

**Except because of whoring!**

*(Shrugging.)*

**He forces her to become defiled.**

TAMAR

A few giggled at the "whoring line", but his serious tone quieted most of the crowd. And many women applauded.

PISCA

My mind went another direction. I began wondering if my father had turned my mother loose because of her disease. After the clan tossed us out, father brought us our food himself, so he could see us. But over time, he stopped coming, sending servants. Had my mother been turned loose?

DEMAS

*(Sadly)*

**And when anyone has sex with a loose woman? He becomes a defiler.**

TAMAR

Released women without families to support them often turn to whoring to survive.

PISCA

I didn't understand this. I was wondering if we would have a home to go back to if we were cured someday.

TAMAR

And Ulla called out to the teacher again.

ULLA

*(From the audience)*

Divorce is the only vow a man can break simply by paying a lawyer to write a note.

TAMAR

She got another laugh. And it upset the lawyers among the Distinguished again. One of them came back at her.

EZRA

*(From the Distinguished section.)*

Without our overseeing the law, no one would honor any vows!

PISCA

The Nazarene smiled.

DEMAS

**Again, you have all heard that it is proclaimed by the ancients.**

*(Unrolling a scroll and reading, using an old man's voice)*

**Do not renege on a promise!**

*(Wagging his finger at the audience and continuing in the old man voice.)*

**You each are going to give back to the Lord! Those promises of yours!**

PISCA

Which drew both laughter and groans from the crowd.

TAMAR

Groans because it was another familiar line of the Distinguished. The Distinguished required "giving back to the Lord"...

*(Rubbing her fingers together in  
the sign for money.)*

That is, paying them and the temple for the binding of oaths.

DEMAS

*(Touches his chest.)*

**I myself, however?**

PISCA

More laughter from the repeating.

DEMAS

**I am telling you all, you do not want, anyone of you, to swear vows.**

TAMAR

Several in the crowd expressed confusion about this idea.

ULLA

*(From the audience.)*

We shouldn't swear on the sky? Or the earth?

DEMAS

**Really! Neither on that sky:**

*(Looking up and indicating the  
sky)*

**Since a judge's bench is for the Deity.**

PISCA

And looking up, I saw a cloud that looked like the big chair that judges sit in.

DEMAS

**Nor on the mother earth, since, a footstool?**

*(Resting his foot on the ROCK.)*

**It is for those feet of His.**

FESTUS

*(From the audience.)*

What about vows in Jerusalem? At the temple?

DEMAS

**Nor in Jerusalem, since a city is for...**

*(Theatrically bowing.)*

**The great: a king!**

*(Striking a kingly pose.)*

ULLA

And our own Ezra was inspired to call out his question.

EZRA

*(From the audience.)*

So our promises fall only upon our own heads?

DEMAS

*(Invites EZRA to join him on stage.)*

**Nor should you promise on that head of yours,**

*(Indicating EZRA's head.)*

**Seeing that you really don't have the power to make a single hair**

*(Holding up a single finger and pointing to EZRA's gray hair.)*

**Light...**

*(Pointing to his own dark hair.)*

**Or dark!**

**You fix it for yourself by an agreement.**

*(Turning to the audience.)*

**That word of all of yours...**

*(Making an OK sign with his right hand.)*

**Yes**

*(Slashing with his left hand.)*

**Or no!**

**That, however, more than these?**

*(Holding up his hands)*

**Out of that worthlessness,**

DEMAS (cont.)

*(DEMAS recreates the earlier scene about being thrown in jail, tugging the shoulder of his tunic up and pulling it as if he was being dragged, one way, and the other, and throwing himself forward, and gripping imaginary bars, searching his clothing and holding up a PENNY, kissing the PENNY good-bye, tossing it toward EZRA.)*

**It exists!**

ULLA

And we applauded the whole bit.

EZRA

The Nazarene's words stuck a chord within me. When I was young, I'd made a vow on my own head. I had kept it, but must an old man live according to the outdated desires of a foolish young man?

DEMAS

*(Removing the SASH.)*

The dismissal of vows worried the Distinguished. Like divorce, they officiated over vows, especially contracts between people. It gave them power.

TAMAR

*(Rubbing her fingers together.)*

And money.

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 7

AT RISE                   The SASH passes from DEMAS to TAMAR.  
 DEMAS goes into the audience.

TAMAR

*(Holds the SASH.)*

So did the Nazarene take Judean law more lightly or more seriously than the Distinguished? Perhaps both.

ULLA

He took the criticisms of the Distinguished lightly.

EZRA

But to the Distinguished, all of this was deadly serious. Another Distinguished elder tried to trip up the Nazarene.

*(Goes into the audience)*

DEMAS

*(In the Distinguished section.)*

If people don't vow to God, they will break their word and then take revenge on one another!

TAMAR

*(Puts on the SASH and pretending to unroll a scroll.)*

**You have heard that it was proclaimed...**

ULLA

We all laughed. Even before he said anything.

TAMAR

*(Uses a old person's voice and closing one eye.)*

**An eye in return for an eye.**

*(Pretending to pluck out her right eye with one hand.)*

**And then more...**

*(Pretending to pull out a tooth, with the other hand and lisping the next line.)*

**A tooth in return for a tooth.**

*(Holding both hands before her.)*

PISCA

"Tooff". We laughed.  
(Goes into the audience.)

TAMAR

(Lisps with one eye closed.)

**I myself, however?**  
(Holding both hands before her.)

**I am telling you all-**  
(Both hands side-by-side to the audience.)

**You do not want to compare-**  
(Balancing her hands against each other.)

**The worthless!**  
(Using the throwing-out-the-trash gesture.)

ULLA

The crowd applauded the idea, but many were skeptical.

EZRA

(From the audience)

So what do I do if someone punches me in the jaw?

TAMAR

**So, someone punches on that right jaw of yours?**  
(Raising up her fist and saying in a threatening voice.)

**Turn back to him...**  
(Softening her voice and offering her left cheek.)

**Also the other?**

ULLA

We laughed. The Master was having fun.

FESTUS

Silliness is contagious. Someone twirled a tunic over his head and called out a question.

DEMAS

*(In the audience, twirling the SHIRT.)*

Should I also give in to someone suing me in court? I will lose my shirt!

*(TAMAR waves for DEMAS to join her on stage.)*

FESTUS

We applauded him as he walked up.

ULLA

I was surprised that the man seemed sober.

TAMAR

*(Speaks to DEMAS.)*

**Also for the one wanting to sue you?**

*(Indicating the SHIRT in the man's hand by lifting it up.)*

**And that shirt of yours...**

*(Pulling on the SHIRT in DEMAS's hand.)*

**To take it?**

*(DEMAS pulls back creating a tug of war over the SHIRT that lasts a several seconds.)*

**Let go!**

*(Releasing her end of the SHIRT and DEMAS falls back.)*

ULLA

*(Clapping)*

We laughed and applauded.

TAMAR

*(Helping DEMAS up and embracing him, taking off her CLOAK and offering it to DEMAS.)*

**Also the cloak!**

*(DEMAS shakes his head, denying the offer.)*

ULLA

*(Clapping)*

We cheered and applauded louder.

DEMAS

As an aspiring lawyer, letting go instead of fighting in court bothered me. But I had seen what court was like. It served no one but the lawyers. We told ourselves that we were helping others, that without courts disputes would lead to violence. The Nazarene's words made some angry, but it made me thoughtful.

ULLA

And while you were thinking, a street urchin called out.

PISCA

*(From the back of the audience.)*

So I shouldn't fight for myself if someone forces me to bear burdens for them?

*(TAMAR answers by signaling PISCA to join her on stage.)*

DEMAS

In Judea, the powerful use their guards to force bystanders to carry their burdens. The powerful may travel without their own porters, but they never travel without guards.

PISCA

I may be poor, but I am free, not a slave. I should just accept it even if someone forces me to work for him?

TAMAR

*(Putting her arms around PISCA's shoulder and speaking to her warmly.)*

**Even if he might press you into service.**

PISCA

Even if he wants me to go a mile?

TAMAR

**A mile?**

*(PISCA nods. TAMAR holds up a finger.)*

**One?**

*(PISCA nods.)*

**Go along with him!**

*(Holding up two fingers.)*

**For two!**

PISCA

But they won't pay me a penny! Not even if I beg.

*(Holding her hands begging.)*

TAMAR

**To the one begging from you,**

*(Touching a finger to PISCA's chest and accentuating the "you")*

**Give!**

*(Dropping PENNIES into PISCA's hands.)*

PISCA

Lucky, those beggars!

*(TAMAR laughs.)*

ULLA

We laughed and applauded the boy's quickness.

PISCA

*(Holding up the PENNIES.)*

Thank you kindly, master, but giving so much in front of everyone, others will want to borrow from me.

TAMAR

**Also,**

*(Dropping more PENNIES)*

**For the one wanting to borrow from you!**

PISCA

Give this to them?

TAMAR

**You might not want to turn away!**

PISCA

If you mean I should keep my eyes on them, you're right. When I get this much, I try to keep it a secret, even from myself. Don't want my left hand to know what it is doing, my right hand, so to speak.

FESTUS

We laughed. The boy was a philosopher. The Demas's Distinguished boss had something more to say.

*(FESTUS goes into audience.)*

EZRA

*(From the Distinguished section.)*

But the law doesn't tell us to give to those who hate us!

TAMAR

**You have heard that it was proclaimed—!**

*(Pretending to unroll another scroll and reading it in an old person's voice. Warmly.)*

**Love those close to you.**

*(Then bitterly.)*

**And hate those hated of yours!**

*(Putting her hand to her chest)*

**I myself, however?**

PISCA

*(Moving to the back of the stage.)*

The Master moved toward where my mother...

*(ULLA joins PISCA, playing PISCA's mother.)*

And I were sitting apart from the crowd.

TAMAR

*(Sincerely to the audience)*

**I am telling you all,**

*(Gesturing to include the whole audience.)*

**Embrace those hated of yours.**

*(Embracing PISCA and ULLA.)*

DEMAS

It was both brave and foolish to embrace the diseased.

PISCA

It was also the greatest thing ever!

DEMAS

The Distinguished hadn't noticed Pisca and her mother before. They had arrived after the Nazarene had declared them lucky. They were shocked to notice their disease!

EZRA

*(From Distinguished section.)*

They are unclean! You are openly breaking our laws!

TAMAR

*(To PISCA and ULLA as her mother, gesturing toward EZRA.)*

**Pray for those who harass you.**

ULLA

Why?

TAMAR

**In order that you might become children of that Father of yours, the one in the skies.**

*(Pointing to the sky.)*

THE REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

ULLA

At this point the sun came out from the clouds.

TAMAR

**Because, that sun of His?**

*(Indicating the sun.)*

**He makes it rise on the worthless...**

*(Indicating herself.)*

**And the valuable.**

*(Indicating the audience.)*

DEMAS

Then came a strange moment. The sun was shining, but a sprinkle of rain began to fall.

ULLA

It was refreshing in the heat, and only lasted a moment. But the Teacher used it.

TAMAR

**Not only does He shower rain...**

*(Gesturing toward the rain.)*

**On the law-abiding...**

*(Gesturing toward the Distinguished.)*

**But also the law-breakers.**

*(Indicating herself.)*

EZRA

*(From the Distinguished section.)*

But to live the law, we must never embrace law-breakers.

TAMAR

**Since, maybe, you show affection to those showing affection for you?**

*(Taking her arm from PISCA and wrapping both of her arms around herself.)*

**What compensation do you have due?**

*(Giving herself another squeeze.)*

**Don't even the...**

*(Gesturing toward the back.)*

**Tax collectors do that!**

ULLA

We laughed. The tax collectors were in the back of the crowd with the whores and other outcasts.

TAMAR

**Also, if you all embrace...**

*(Gesturing toward PISCA and ULLA  
embracing each other.)*

**Those relatives of yours alone, what out of the ordinary  
are you doing?**

*(Shrugging.)*

**Nothing!**

*(Gesturing toward FESTUS who is  
standing in the audience. )*

**Don't even those other ethnic groups do the same thing?**

PISCA

As we laughed, one of the Romans called out.

FESTUS

*(In the audience.)*

If we embrace our enemies, how can we be true Romans or  
Judeans or Greeks?

TAMAR

*(Smiling and shrugging)*

**You all will truly be yourselves.**

FESTUS

*(From the audience, cynically.)*

But what the hades will that be?

PISCA

And we laughed.

TAMAR

*(Laughing and addressing FESTUS  
directly)*

**Perfect!**

*(Addressing the entire audience.)*

**As that Father of yours, the sky one.**

*(TAMAR points to the sky.)*

THE REST OF THE CAST

*(Quietly and slowly.)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!  
Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

TAMAR

*(Saluting the sky)*

**Perfect. He is.**

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 8

AT RISE:                   The SASH passed from TAMAR to EZRA.

TAMAR

Before I heard the Teacher, I was skeptical about my people's history, but seeing the Teacher was like seeing the luminaries of old.

DEMAS

People ask us if this was because the Teacher was a good performer, an actor. My answer is no.

FESTUS

I was an actor, and I can tell you from first-hand experience, the best of them are merely convincing liars.

PISCA

The Master was never false.

DEMAS

Nor are we acting here. We are telling a story. Storytelling is a Judean tradition, used for passing down our history. And the Teacher was the best storyteller anyone has ever seen.

*(Goes into the audience).*

ULLA

Every tribe and town has storytellers. But next to the Master?

EZRA

Like comparing a lamp to the sun. The Master entertained, doing funny voices and acting out his words, but he was always being himself, open, hiding nothing.

FESTUS

Which brings us back to our story. Despite the presence of the Distinguished, the mood remained happy.

ULLA

Especially after the sunshine and rain.

EZRA

That idea of perfecting ourselves seemed to trigger the next question.

TAMAR

*(From the audience.)*

Will the Deity perfect us if we are virtuous?

EZRA

*(Puts on the SASH.)*

**Take care, however, of that virtue of yours.**

TAMAR

Is it virtuous to perform public acts of charity?

EZRA

*(Acts out his words)*

**Not to perform in front of people for the purpose of displaying yourself to them.**

*(Displaying himself)*

ULLA

And we laughed at how he acted it out.

EZRA

*(Shrugs)*

**Unless, however, you really don't want a reward. You are not going to get it from that Father of yours, the one in the skies.**

*(Pointing upward.)*

REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

EZRA

**When you truly perform a kindness, you don't want to blow a trumpet.**

*(Pretending to blow a trumpet.)*

**Before you like, the actors!**

*(Making a theatrical bow.)*

**They perform in the meeting places and in the crowded streets. So that they might be recognized by the people.**

EZRA (cont.)

*(Acting as if accepting applause, making little bows right and left.)*

**Honestly, I'm telling you...**

*(Putting his hand over his heart.)*

**They are getting that payment of theirs!**

*(Making the "accepting applause" gesture again.)*

TAMAR

*(Approaching the stage.)*

What should I do instead?

EZRA

*(Brings TAMAR up on stage and speaking to her personally.)*

**If you perform a kindness?**

*(Affecting the voice of PISCA as the street urchin.)*

**Don't let that left of yours know what it is doing: that right hand of yours.**

ULLA

The street urchin's line. We laughed, but then, just like for the urchin, he took out some coppers.

EZRA

*(Puts PENNIES into TAMAR's hand.)*

**So that it might be...**

*(Leading TAMAR to PISCA.)*

**Your kindness.**

*(Indicating giving PENNIES to PISCA. TAMAR does so.)*

**In the hidden.**

*(Closing PISCA's hand and pointing to TAMAR's heart.)*

ULLA

The crowd was quiet.

EZRA

*(Happily.)*

**And that Father of yours, the one seeing into the hidden?**

*(Indicating TAMAR's heart.)*

**He is going to give back to you.**

TAMAR

*(Steps out of the scene.)*

Though I wasn't actually the person asking this question, the Teacher's answer wounded me. I was a very visible giver to charity. I felt virtuous showing off my father's wealth. It was painful to think about giving up that attention.

ULLA

It must have affected Demas too because this is where he asked his question.

DEMAS

*(From the Distinguished section.)*

So we hide our good deeds? When else do we hide?

EZRA

*(Smiling.)*

**Also when you pray.**

PISCA

Oh, what an uproar that caused!

TAMAR

Public prayer is popular. Very popular.

FESTUS

One of the few public demonstrations the Romans allow.

*(FESTUS goes into audience)*

DEMAS

*(Returns to the stage)*

My elders saw an opportunity in the crowd's reaction. They thought I was a genius for asking the question.

TAMAR

Demas was trying to impress his future father-in-law.  
*(TAMAR goes back into the audience.)*

DEMAS

No, but my master and the other Distinguished elders immediately stood up to encourage the crowd's protest.  
*(DEMAS goes into audience and speaking to the audience.)*

He wants to take away your right to public prayer? Will you stand for this?

PISCA

Many in the crowd complained.

TAMAR

*(From audience.)*  
Public prayer is our right! Public prayer is our right!

FESTUS

*(From audience.)*  
Even the Romans cannot stop it!

ULLA

*(Indicating EZRA)*  
But the Teacher just waited patiently, happily. Finally, the hubbub faded when he raised his arms for quiet.

EZRA

*(Raises his arms.)*  
**Don't be like the actors!**  
*(Taking a dramatic pose expressing horror.)*

PISCA

This drew a nervous little laugh.

ULLA

Then the Teacher became more animated.

EZRA

**Because they love...**

EZRA (cont.)

*(Embracing himself.)*

**In those meetings and on those crossroads, standing to pray for themselves...**

*(Bowing over and over, getting more and more exaggerated.)*

ULLA

He bowed over and over until we began to laugh.

EZRA

**So that they shine,**

*(Doing a hand shimmer.)*

**Among the people!**

*(Bowing to the crowd, right and left, blowing them kisses.)*

**Honestly, I'm telling you...**

*(Putting his hand over his heart.)*

**They are getting that pay of theirs.**

*(Making the "accepting applause" gesture again.)*

PISCA

He kept us laughing through this all.

ULLA

Enough so that he kept the louder critics quiet, but some still felt he was mocking prayer in general.

EZRA

**You, however,**

*(Pointing to DEMAS in the Distinguished section and gesturing to join him on stage.)*

**When you pray?**

*(Putting his arm around DEMAS.)*

**Go in that inner sanctum of yours.**

*(Pretending to open a door for DEMAS, and gesturing for him to go through it.)*

**And shutting that door of yours.**

EZRA (cont.)

*(Pretending to shut a door behind them.)*

**Pray to that Father of yours**

*(Bowing his head and holding his hands palms up. DEMAS copies.)*

**The One within the hidden.**

*(Indicating DEMAS's heart.)*

**And that Father of yours, the one seeing into the hidden?**

*(Indicating DEMAS's heart.)*

**He is going to give back to you.**

ULLA

*(Clapping)*

Many applauded, but the Distinguished complained and encouraged more protest.

DEMAS

But then another group stood up to pray very loudly together. We call them the Samarites but that would be the Watchers, in the common tongue. They are half-breed Judeans, considered heretics. They usually don't speak publicly among us much less pray. Hearing them was shocking.

FESTUS and TAMAR

*(From audience, bowing, chanting running the words together.)*

Eloowwem of Abraahm, we bow to You.

Eloowwem of Yesaaq, we bow to You.

Eloowwem of Yaaqob, we bow to You.

Eloowwem of Yusef, we bow to You.

Eloowwem of Mooshe, we bow to You.

*(FESTUS and TAMAR continue to repeat this more quietly).*

DEMAS

We heard a parody of ourselves.

TAMAR

The crowd quieted except for the Samarites.

EZRA

**Praying? Like that?**

EZRA (cont.)

*(Indicating FESTUS and TAMAR.)*

**I don't want to re-re-re-repeat.**

*(Stuttering.)*

**Like those other ethnic groups.**

PISCA

It was funny.

DEMAS

And it changed our perspective. Even my elders quieted down. Only the Samarites continued praying stubbornly.

*(FESTUS, TAMAR continue quietly).*

EZRA

*(Indicates FESTUS, TAMAR.)*

**Because they think that in their long-windedness...**

*(Puppeting his hand talking on and on.)*

**They are going to be...**

*(Pretending to nod off then waking up.)*

**Listened to.**

PISCA

We laughed.

EZRA

*(Shakes his head)*

**You all don't want, really, to become like them.**

ULLA

The Samarites finally gave up their chanting.

EZRA

**Because He has seen, the Divine, that Father of yours what needs you all have**

*(Gesturing to include the whole crowd.)*

**Before anyone else.**

*(Pointing upward.)*

REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

PISCA

Everyone started clapping, I joined them.

DEMAS

Then a cranky-sounding woman called out.

TAMAR

*(From the audience, crankily)*

Why should the Divine care about my needs?

EZRA

**Yours? Ask Him!**

TAMAR

*(From the audience, more gently.)*

What do we ask him? How?

EZRA

**In this way, then, you pray for yourselves. All of you!**

DEMAS

Then he sat down among his followers with his back to us,  
so he was hidden to the crowd.

ULLA

We heard his prayer, but the speaking area was empty  
except for light because the sun came out again.

PISCA

But he spoke every line patiently, like he was unwrapping  
a series of presents.

EZRA

*(Going off stage)*

**Father of ours:**

**The one in the skies.**

**Let it be sanctified: this name of Yours.**

**Let it start: this reign of Yours.**

**Let it emerge: this purpose of Yours.**

**As in sky,**

EZRA (cont.)

Also as on earth.  
This bread of ours,  
The existing upon,  
Give to us today.  
Also, let go for us what is owed by us.  
Just as we ourselves let go what is owed to us.  
Also, You might not want to bring us into a trial.  
Instead, draw us toward Yourself, away from the  
worthless.

ULLA

When he was done praying, the crowd was quiet. Then  
someone called out.

FESTUS

That's a public prayer! No reward for you!

DEMAS

The Nazarene stood up, laughed, and applauded.

PISCA

We all laughed and applauded as well.

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

(END OF ACT I)

ACT II

## SCENE 1

AT RISE:                   EZRA passes SASH to ULLA.

## FESTUS

By this point, we all knew we were witnessing something special. Even those who were celebrating the event with wine, like I was.

## TAMAR

The crowd was quiet after the Teacher's prayer. For awhile. As with much of what the Teacher did and said that day, his prayer impressed us all differently.

## ULLA

I focused on the bread part. I like bread. It was funny how the Teacher equated it with the law as what we exist upon. Leaven gives bread life. Life grows. And life grows old and stale.

## PISCA

I found myself wondering: if the Father doesn't want to lead us into a trial, why are our lives so filled with trials? Like my mother's and mine. Our disease.

*(PISCA goes into audience.)*

## TAMAR

My father was the only thing I trusted, so I liked the way the Teacher addressed the Divine as a father rather than our traditional as "master". My father also hated debt. He said more slaves are made by debt than Roman conquest.

## EZRA

But, in our way of speaking, most debts aren't about money. They come from mistakes people make. Not just the mistakes that cost time or money. Just offending some people puts you in their debt. We Judeans can be a proud people, sensitive to slights. Inviting someone to dinner can put them in your debt, but not invited someone else can be seen as a slight, also creating a debt.

*(EZRA goes into the audience.)*

DEMAS

For the Distinguished, forgiving debts is a sensitive topic. Our first lawgiver, Moses, said that debts must be forgiven every seven years. We choose to ignore this law today. We say it is impractical in our modern era.

TAMAR

So it wasn't surprising that the first question after the prayer was about debts.

PISCA

*(From the audience.)*

Why do we let go those who owe us? Don't people need to be held accountable?

EZRA

*(From audience.)*

Especially when people are offensive, like those stumbling drunks tripping over their immorality?

ULLA

*(Warmly, happily)*

**Because, if you all...**

*(Making a right-hand gesture, indicating the whole audience.)*

**Let go for these people...**

*(Making a left-hand gesture, indicating the whole audience. Then taking a step back, creating a little stumble over ROCK.)*

**Those missteps of theirs.**

*(Looking critically down at the ROCK.)*

**He is going to let you go as well...That Father of yours...  
The sky one.**

*(Pointing to the sky.)*

REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

ULLA

*(Shrugging)*

**If, however, you all don't want to let go of these people...**

*(Making a right-hand gesture, indicating the whole audience and again feigning a stumble over ROCK.)*

**Those missteps of theirs.**

*(Moving ROCK out of the way.)*

**Neither is that Father of yours going to let go of those missteps of yours.**

*(Taking a pratfall.)*

FESTUS

So much for the serious mood. And now I get to pretend I am a Judean who is fasting.

TAMAR

When fasting, Judeans make a public show of it. We do not groom our hair.

*(Messing up FESTUS's hair.)*

We cover our faces with ashes.

*(Rubbing ash on FESTUS's face.)*

We wear dishevelled clothes.

*(Messing up FESTUS's cloths and stepping back for a look.)*

That looks about right.

*(FESTUS displays himself and then goes into the audience.)*

DEMAS

I should also explain that among our people, fasting is, or maybe was, a sign of atonement. It started as one day a year, fasting on the Day of Atonement, but it grew more popular over time. We added more and more fast days. Now, we fast any time we feel we need it. A drunk who embarrasses himself in public might go on a fast to show his regret or signal his new found virtue. So a man who was fasting called out.

FESTUS

Does fasting atone for our missteps?

ULLA

*(Thoughtfully)***When, however, you all fast?***(Indicating the whole crowd.)***You don't want to become like the actors!***(Striking a pose of sadness.)*

TAMAR

His pose clearly meant to be funny.

ULLA

**Gloomy! Since they mask those faces of theirs.***(Covering her face with a hand.)***So that they might show off among people!***(Lifting her hand and making a happy face. Passing her hand over her face again and returning to a sad face.)***Fasting!****Honestly, I'm telling you—***(Putting her hand over her heart.)***They are getting that reward of theirs.***(Making the "accepting applause" gesture and signalling for FESTUS to join her.)*

ULLA

*(To FESTUS)***You, however, fasting?***(FESTUS nods.)*

ULLA

*(Happily, handing FESTUS the OIL VIAL)***Oil your head!***(FESTUS pours some oil out and smooths his hair.)***And that face of yours? Wash!***(Handing FESTUS a CLOTH.)*

*(FESTUS wipes off the ash.)*

ULLA

*(Still speaking directly to  
FESTUS.)*

**So, you don't show off for the people.**

*(Emphasizing the "for people" as  
she indicates the crowd.)*

**Fasting!**

*(Making a happy face.)*

**Instead, for that Father of yours, the one in the hidden.**

*(ULLA points to FESTUS's heart.)*

**And that Father of yours, the one seeing into the hidden?**

*(Indicating FESTUS's heart again.)*

**He is going to give back to you.**

DEMAS

*(Clapping)*

Again, we applauded.

TAMAR

But many, like my father and I were skeptical about hidden rewards. As I said, I took pride in my public charities. My father called out a question for me.

EZRA

*(In the audience)*

Doesn't the Divine reward us for all our virtues, private and public? Isn't our accumulation of wealth on earth a sign of Divine favor?

ULLA

*(Smiling, but shaking her head  
no, speaking to audience)*

**You don't want to accumulate for yourselves**

*(Pretending to gather things in  
her arms)*

**Accumulations on the earth!**

*(Pretending to drop a pile on the  
ground.)*

**Where a moth?**

ULLA (cont.)

*(Fluttering her hand above the imaginary pile.)*

**And a meal?**

*(Indicating the imaginary pile.)*

**It hides!**

*(Fluttering down into the pile and then making chomping gestures with both hands.)*

**And where robbers**

*(Masking her face with both hands)*

**Tunnel in,**

*(Pretending to dig toward the pile.)*

**And rob!**

*(Pretending to carry away the pile.)*

EZRA

*(In the audience, laughing)*

But where else do we accumulate the Divine's rewards?

ULLA

**Accumulate...**

*(Pretending to gather things in her arms)*

**Instead, for yourselves, accumulations**

*(Pretending to toss the pile into the air.)*

**In a sky!**

*(Pointing to the sky.)*

REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

ULLA

*(Happily)*

**Where not even a moth.**

*(Fluttering her hand searching around.)*

**Not at all a meal!**

ULLA (cont.)

*(Indicating the imaginary pile in the air.)*

**It hides!**

*(Putting her lips to her fingers/)*

**And where robbers**

*(Masking her face with both hands)*

**Do not tunnel in**

*(Pretending to dig upward.)*

**Nor rob!**

*(Giving up and shrugging.)*

TAMAR

My father and I both laughed at the answer, but he quickly asked another question that I thought was clever.

EZRA

*(In the Audience.)*

Why can't my heart be in the sky even if I accumulate my rewards on the earth?

DEMAS

And again, others from the audience supported that question with their own "why's".

PISCA

*(From audience, encouraging others to join.)*

Why? Yes, Why?

ULLA

*(Shakes her head "no.")*

**Because wherever it is, that accumulation of yours.**

*(Pretending to set down a pile of things and signalling EZRA to come to her.)*

**There it is:**

*(Pointing at the imaginary pile.)*

**That heart of yours!**

*(Holding two grasping hands toward the pile and pulsing them like a heartbeat. She signal EZRA to join her.)*

EZRA

*(Makes his way to the stage.)*

I may be very bright, but my eyes only see what is on earth.

ULLA

*(Points to her eye and speaks to the crowd as EZRA arrives.)*

**The lamp of the body IS the eye.**

*(Examining EZRA's eye closely while addressing him.)*

**If, then, is that eye of yours open?**

EZRA

*(Gestures around them.)*

Yes, and open, it only sees the earth.

TAMAR

At this point, the sun broke through the clouds and the Teacher pointed to it. My Father's eyes followed.

EZRA

*(Grudgingly)*

And also what is in the sky.

ULLA

*(Happily)*

**That whole body of yours?**

*(Indicating EZRA's body.)*

TAMAR

The sunlight lit the whole area, but my father was wearing a bright white tunic and robe, which gleamed in the light.

ULLA

*(Indicates the sun.)*

**Shining!**

*(EZRA sees the light on himself and slowly spins examining his arms and hands in the light.)*

**It is going to be!**

TAMAR

The brightness was amazing, but it only lasted a moment.  
*(The LIGHT goes out on EZRA.)*

ULLA

*(Directly to EZRA.)*

**If, however, that eye of yours is worthless? That whole  
 body of yours?**

DEMAS

The crowd grew quieter as threatening clouds rolled over  
 the sun. Many pointed at the darkening sky.

ULLA

*(To EZRA. LIGHT starts to dim the  
 on stage.)*

**It is going to be dark!**

ULLA

*(Still talking to EZRA.)*

**If the light, the one in you?**

*(Touching EZRA's chest.)*

**Is a darkness?**

*(The LIGHTS continue to dim.)*

**It is a darkness: so dark!**

TAMAR

My father returned and sat down next to me. He was  
 deeply affected. He touched his chest where the Teacher  
 had touched it and turned to me. "It is light", he said  
 quietly. He was a changed man until the day he died.

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 2

AT RISE: PISCA is center stage, holding the SASH.

DEMAS

At this point, a lot of people at the meeting were murmuring about the weather and about whether the Nazarene was really controlling it.

TAMAR

And as with so many things, we had different feelings about that at the time.

PISCA

To me, it seemed like the Master controlled the clouds. It was like seeing the miracles we heard about in the old stories.

ULLA

And it wasn't just children who felt that way. A lot of people like me saw these events as miraculous. To us, the Teacher was working wonders before our own eyes.

DEMAS

But were they really wonders? It was cloudy. The sun came out and then went away many times that day. A few times, the Nazarene was able to work the sun's appearance into his remarks. He had a command, but not a command of the sky. It was his command of the situation. He paid attention to what was happening, what people were saying. And he responded in the moment. It seemed magical because so few people can pay attention and act on what they see.

TAMAR

Or maybe he saw himself as responding to his Father, in the sky? It is near: the realm of the sky.

EZRA

So was the sky working with him or was he working with the sky? You decide.

PISCA

But it wasn't just the sky. There were the birds and the snake...

TAMAR

Yes, but let's not get ahead of our story.

EZRA

This is an old question about the Divine: why doesn't the "All Powerful" force us to abide by his will? Because His will is for us to make our own choices. Nothing that happened with the Nazarene forced us to believe one way or another. Most who saw these things trusted him, but many, the Distinguished among them, saw the same things and chose not to trust.

TAMAR

As the crowd was murmuring about the Teacher and the sky, a servant asked the next question.

FESTUS

*(From the audience.)*

I am a bond slave to a worldly man. And he is not going to let my debts go. I want your realm of the sky, but how can I serve a higher power when I am already slaving for Mr. Moneybags?

PISCA

*(Puts on the SASH.)*

**No one has the power, to slave for two masters...**

ULLA

And again, as he paused, people asked why. It was now like he was pausing on purpose to get us to ask.

EZRA

*(From audience, encouraging others to join.)*

Why? Yes, Why?

PISCA

**Because either he is going to...**

*(Shaking a fist at the sky.)*

**Hate the one...**

*(Patting the earth.)*

**And care for the other. Or...**

*(Turning palms to heaven.)*

**He is going to attach himself to one...**

PISCA (cont.)

*(Looking down sadly.)*

**And he is going to look down on the other.**

*(Happily)*

FESTUS

But I am a slave! I don't have the ability to make my own choices.

TAMAR

The Teacher disagreed with a shake of his head, but then addressed the whole group.

DEMAS

**You all do not have the ability,**

*(Giving a thumbs up and down.)*

**To be a slave for the Divine and Mr. Moneybags.**

TAMAR

Many of the people there were slaves, bondsmen enslaved by debt. They called out to the Teacher.

EZRA

*(From the audience.)*

But we must slave for our bread!

FESTUS

*(From the audience, drunkenly.)*

We need our drink...to kill the pain of slaving for our bread!

ULLA

*(From the audience.)*

I'm not going to run around without clothes!

EZRA

*(From the audience.)*

What do you mean? By this, are you telling us not to care for ourselves?

PISCA

**By this, I'm telling you all don't WORRY!**

*(Taking a pose as if worrying,  
then continuing more lightly)*

**About that self of yours.**

**What you might eat?**

*(Pretending to eat.)*

**Or drink?**

*(Pretending to drink.)*

**Nor for that body of yours. What you might put on.**

*(Pretending to wrap on a robe.)*

**Certainly not! This self is more than food. And the body?  
A covering!**

DEMAS

At this point, a flock of birds flew overhead.

TAMAR

Another happy coincidence.

PISCA

*(Points to the sky)*

**Look up! To the winged ones of the sky!**

**Because they don't really...**

*(Switching to a sing-song voice  
and pretending to scatter seed.)*

**Sow,**

*(Pretending to hoe.)*

**or hoe,**

*(Pretending to stack)*

**or stow...into storehouses.**

TAMAR

The rhyme was fun. Some laughed and some applauded.

PISCA

*(Happily)*

**And the Father of you all? That sky one? He fattens them!**

*(Sticking out her belly and  
patting it.)*

**Aren't you yourselves more important than they?**

*(Raising her hand as if asking  
for a response to the question.)*

DEMAS

It was like Nazarene was testing the trust of the audience. As he paused, more and more chose to raise their hands. As more hands went up, the happier he became.

PISCA

*(Happily)*

**Who, from your worrying...**

*(Taking a worrying pose.)*

**Has the power to add to that lifetime of his?**

FESTUS

*(From the audience.)*

But we aren't children! Isn't there a big difference between the worries of children and ours as adults?

PISCA

*(Nods in agreement, holds her  
hands at different heights, that  
of a child and an adult.)*

**Eighteen inches!**

TAMAR

We all laughed. But the same man had another question.

FESTUS

*(From the audience.)*

Then why doesn't the Divine make all of those worshipping him rich to prove his power to the world?

TAMAR

Instead of answering, the Teacher signalled his followers and they recited another verse from Moses.

REST OF CAST

Never will you test the Lord, that divine of yours.

DEMAS

Judeans are taught that the divine is beyond our proofs.

ULLA

*(From audience.)*

But what about our clothing? It shows our status to others, determining what they think of us. Don't we have to worry about that?

PISCA

**Also, about your clothing.****Why do you worry?**

*(Taking a worrying pose, picking the FLOWER from its pot, and holding it toward the audience.)*

**Look closely at the wildflowers of this countryside.**

PISCA (cont.)

*(Switching to a sing-song voice and gesturing a flower growing.)*

**How do they grow?**

*(Pantomiming tying a bow.)*

**They don't bow.**

*(Pretending to sew.)*

**Nor do they sew.**

FESTUS

*(From audience, hopefully.)*

Are you saying women don't need to wear clothes?

PISCA

*(Cheerfully, shakes her head "no.")*

**I'm saying, however, to you all, that not even Solomon, with all that fame of his, wrapped himself...**

*(Throwing an imaginary robe around herself.)*

**As well as one of these.**

*(Holding up the FLOWER.)*

DEMAS

*(Clapping)*

Many applauded.

PISCA

*(More seriously)*

**If, however, this foliage of the countryside, existing**

**for today,**

*(Indicating the FLOWER.)*

**And tomorrow? Into the oven, being tossed!**

*(Tossing FLOWER with throwing-out-the-trash gesture)*

**The Divine, in this way, clothes!**

DEMAS

There was a deeper meaning there, about our bodies being temporary like our clothes, but most missed it, including the lady that asked the question about clothes.

ULLA

*(From the audience, cynically.)*

But the Divine doesn't clothe us like that!

PISCA

*(Gestures toward ULLA, indicating her outfit)*

**No? Much better!**

*(Turning to the crowd.)*

**For all of you!**

TAMAR

We looked around. As we can look around here today. All these styles and colors of clothing we see here? We wore them there as well.

PISCA

**You tiny trusters! You all don't want to worry,**

*(Taking a worrying pose.)*

**Saying,**

*(Using a different voice for each line and pretending to eat.)*

**What do we eat?**

*(Pretending to drink.)*

**What do we drink?**

*(Pretending to wrap on a cloak.)*

**What do we put on ourselves.**

*(Striking a pose.)*

DEMAS

Then a Roman called out.

FESTUS

*(From the audience)*

If your divine can provide physical wealth, why are other nations more wealthy?

PISCA

**Because these things are ALL those other ethnic groups seek after!**

DEMAS

The many different ethnic groups among us cheered this idea. Many of us laughed at them for doing so.

ULLA

*(From the audience.)*

I agree that we need more than food and clothing, but how can the Divine know everything we need?

PISCA

**Because He has seen, that Father of you all, sky-like,**  
*(Gesturing broadly.)*

**That you need these things in every area.**

EZRA

*(From the audience.)*

But how do those of us who are Judean or who follow you act differently than those other groups?

PISCA

*(In a serious tone)*

**You search, however, first...**

*(Holding up a single finger)*

**For the realm,**

*(Pointing upwards with that finger.)*

THE REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

PISCA

**And that virtue of His, and these things? All?**

*(Gesturing broadly.)*

**They shall be put in front of you!**

*(Pretending to serve a platter.)*

FESTUS

*(From audience)*

But don't we have to prepare for bad times and worry about our future?

PISCA

**You all certainly don't want to worry...**

*(Taking a worrying pose.)*

**About tomorrow.**

*(PISCA points to audience right.)*

TAMAR

The Master pointed to the dark clouds over the sea in the distance.

PISCA

**Because tomorrow?**

DEMAS

There was a small flash of lightening in the dark clouds.

PISCA

**It is going to worry...**

*(Taking a worrying pose and then saying more lightly)*

**about itself!**

TAMAR

He said it in a funny way that made us laugh. The lightning was distant and seemed to be moving away from us.

PISCA

*(Cheerfully.)*

**Enough!**

*(Patting her stomach and holding up her hand like someone declining the offer of more food.)*

**For this day, the suffering of it!**

(FADE TO BLACK)  
(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 3

AT RISE: PISCA removes the SASH and passes it to DEMAS.

DEMAS

*(Holds out the SASH.)*

It is true that I didn't see the Nazarene as magical as some others do.

*(Smiling blandly at TAMAR and PISCA.)*

However, in focusing on his use of the sun coming out or birds flying by, we can miss the real magic here. Think about what he was saying, things that no one had ever said before: let people slug you, let go of debts, hug those who hate you, and on and on. He not only made these ideas entertaining and interesting, he actually made them sound reasonable and preferable to our normal way of living. He was changing our minds, like his chant said. And the whole time, he was making jokes and exaggerating everything, pretending we could pluck out our eyes or cut off our arms. That was the real miracle.

ULLA

And it drove your Distinguished crazy.

DEMAS

Because his ideas and actions were crazy and yet minds were being changed. Most of the crowd went along with it, but the Distinguished couldn't.

PISCA

Who were the real crazy ones? Was I crazy for believing I could be cured?

EZRA

Listening to him, I began seeing that I had been crazy, worrying about clothing and status. When young, I'd taken vows of celibacy and poverty to work toward becoming the leader of my religious community. I had reached that goal a decade before, but did I feel fulfilled? I worried more than ever about my status, my position. I had thought I was wise, but listening to him, my mind was changing.

TAMAR

My mind was changing too. My public charity. I saw that my virtue was nothing but vanity. But I wasn't unhappy about changing. I felt freer letting it go.

ULLA

My mind was changing too. I was having more fun that day than I had had since I was a girl. I realized that I had become an old woman, both outside and in. I thought I had only death to look forward to, but, just by being there that day, I felt more life and the desire for more.

TAMAR

Maybe that was the Teacher's real magic. We all had a great time together that day, despite his craziness, our craziness, and the crazy divisions among us. And that brings us right back to our story. A man from a group that most people there thought was crazy, the ascetics, asked the next question.

EZRA

*(From the audience, wearing the ANIMAL SKIN.)*

We're called crazy for not eating, drinking, or wearing cloth. Who is crazier, the ascetics or the worriers, who think only eating, drinking, and their appearance matters?

DEMAS

*(Cheerfully to the crowd.)*

**You don't want to criticize,**

*(Twirling a finger next to his ear, making the crazy sign.)*

**When you don't want to be criticized.**

*(Making the opposite crazy sign over the other ear.)*

ULLA

*(From audience.)*

Why can't a sane person criticize a crazy one?

TAMAR

Which got many supporting "why's".

ULLA and FESTUS  
*(From audience, encouraging  
others to join.)*

Why? Why not?

DEMAS

*(Happily)*

**Because by what criticisms you all**

*(Making a right-hand sweeping  
gesture indicating the crowd.)*

**Criticize,**

*(Making the crazy sign.)*

**You all,**

*(Making a left-hand sweeping  
gesture indicating the crowd.)*

**Are going to be criticized.**

*(Making the opposite crazy sign.)*

EZRA

*(From audience, wearing SKIN.)*

But we ascetics measure by the spiritual not the material  
values of the world. Aren't our measures more sane?

DEMAS

**And by what standard you all measure...**

*(Holding his right hand too high  
over his own head.)*

**It is going to be measured out to you all!**

*(Making the throwing out the  
trash gesture.)*

TAMAR

The crowd laughed nervously at the idea of not measuring  
up to their own standards.

PISCA

Then a man next to the ascetic apologized for him.

FESTUS

*(From audience, next to EZRA)*

Excuse my brother. As an ascetic, his supposed "virtue"  
blinds him, completely blinds him to the real world.

DEMAS

*(Smiling and signalling FESTUS to  
join him on stage. )*

**What, however, do YOU see?**

FESTUS

*(Nervously.)*

That he has a bit of blindness toward the practical?

DEMAS

*(Smiling)*

**That's a speck in the eye of that brother of yours?**

*(FESTUS nods. DEMAS looks closely  
at FESTUS's face.)*

**That one, however, in your own eye?**

*(Pointing to FESTUS's eye.)*

FESTUS

*(Confused.)*

My eye? Something in my eye?

DEMAS

*(Peers closer at FESTUS's eye and  
saying seriously.)*

**A roof beam!**

TAMAR

We all laughed. A roof beam in the eye was crazy!

FESTUS

A roof-beam in my eye? That's crazy!

DEMAS

*(Smiling)*

**You don't see? Really?**

FESTUS

I just wanted to help remove my brother's blind spot!

DEMAS

*(In amused disapproval.)*

**How do you say to that brother of yours?**

DEMAS (cont.)

*(Covering his eye with his arm  
and copying FESTUS's voice.)*

**Let go! I am going to take that speck from that eye of yours.**

*(Reaching out with a shaky hand.)*

**And look! That roof beam in that eye of yours!**

*(Waving the arm covering his  
eye.)*

*(FESTUS copies him, covering an  
eye with his arm and waving it.)*

DEMAS

*(Recognizes the imitation and  
applauds.)*

**Mr. Actor! Toss out, first, from that eye of yours...**

*(Pulling FESTUS' his arm from his  
eye.)*

**The roof beam! And then you might see clearly to toss out  
the speck from that eye of that brother of yours!**

*(Hugging FESTUS. FESTUS heads  
back into the audience.)*

ULLA

*(From the audience)*

So we shouldn't criticize these crazy ascetics, but what  
about those men who are just dogs?

PISCA

Some applauded. Some laughed. Some men barked.

EZRA and FESTUS

*(From the audience.)*

Bow-wow! Bow-wow!

TAMAR

Many looked to see who asked the question. So they could  
know which group she was with. So they could know which  
dogs she meant. Then someone added fuel to the fire.

FESTUS

*(From the audience)*

And aren't some women also sows?

PISCA

More cheers, boos, some oinks, and applause.

TAMAR

Again, people looked to see which groups were involved. Then Demas's boss, the Distinguished elder, Johanon, weighed in.

EZRA

*(From Distinguished section)*

People turn into dogs and sows when no one disciplines them to the law.

PISCA

And someone from deeper in the audience challenged this Johanon.

FESTUS

*(From the audience)*

The only things sacred to your type is your social position. Your pearls of wisdom are all self-serving.

TAMAR

The crowd was growing raucous again, when the Teacher raised his hands for quiet and pointed to the sky.

*(DEMAS points to the sky.)*

REST OF THE CAST

*(Encouraging the audience)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

DEMAS

*(Nods thoughtfully and indicates the entire audience.)*

**You all don't want to hand the sacred to those dogs.**

*(Smiling and nodding toward the Distinguished.)*

**Nor are you all going to toss those pearls of yours in front of those sows.**

*(Making a tossing motion.)*

**Not when they might want to trample them with those feet of theirs.**

DEMAS (cont.)

*(Trampling the ground.)*

**And, being twisted,**

*(Twisting up his face and  
snarling and indicating the  
entire audience.)*

**Rip you ALL apart!**

TAMAR

The crowd grew quiet at his vehemence. And again, what he said had a double meaning. Our criticisms are worse than useless to twisted people, just making them mad. But calling each other names was also tearing us apart as a group.

PISCA

And this lead more questions.

FESTUS

*(From the audience)*

How do we learn to see what is true wisdom?

DEMAS

*(Indicates the heavens)*

**Ask! And...**

*(Indicating his heart.)*

**It will be given to you.**

ULLA

*(From the audience)*

Where is the path that brings us together?

DEMAS

*(Indicates crowd.)*

**Search! And...**

*(Making an ah-hah gesture as if  
discovering the crowd.)*

**It will be discovered!**

EZRA

*(From the audience)*

But if there was such a path, it would be barred to us the common people.

DEMAS

*(Knocks on an imaginary door.)*

**Knock! And it is going to be opened for you all!**

*(Pretending to open a door and welcoming someone.)*

EZRA

*(Angrily, from the audience)*

That's not how the world really works!

*(DEMAS smiles and points to the sky.)*

REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

EZRA

*(From audience, frustrated.)*

Why are people so different in your realm of the skies?

TAMAR

Which triggered many "why's" from the crowd.

ULLA and FESTUS

*(From audience, encouraging others to join.)*

Why? Yes, Why?

DEMAS

**Because everyone asking, gets! Not only does the one searching discover, but also to the one knocking...**

*(Pretending to knock.)*

**It is going to be opened.**

*(Pretending to open a door, welcoming someone in, and pointing up.)*

REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

TAMAR

Then one of the prostitutes in the back called out a sad question.

ULLA

*(In back of audience)*

Even for those like us?

DEMAS

*(Happily)*

**Certainly!**

PISCA

Then a man with a child spoke up.

FESTUS

*(From the audience)*

If I were any kind of deity, I wouldn't care about most of these people. Why does yours care about any of us?

TAMAR

The Teacher gestured for the man and his child to come to him.

*(DEMAS gestures to FESTUS.)*

PISCA

*(As FESTUS comes to the stage.)*

The man had a ten-year-old boy. Pretend I am that boy.

DEMAS

*(To FESTUS)*

**What about you? A man?**

FESTUS

Not no deity. Just a fisherman.

DEMAS

*(Speaks to the crowd)*

**From him,**

*(Putting his arm on FESTUS's shoulder.)*

**Might he ask for bread?**

DEMAS (cont.)

*(Touching PISCA on the head.)*

**This child of his?**

TAMAR

The Teacher again raised his hand and waited for a response from the crowd. More and more of us raised our hands as he waited.

ULLA and EZRA

*(From audience, encouraging others to join.)*

Sure he would! Of course! Yes!

DEMAS

*(Picks up the STONE from the stage, shows it to the audience, and speaks to FESTUS.)*

**You're not going to give him a stone?**

FESTUS

Not a stone! Might offer a fish. I am a fisherman not a stone mason.

DEMAS

*(Smiles, lifts up the stone, and drops it)*

**Surely! And he might ask for a fish?**

FESTUS

Absolutely! We never get tired of fish!  
*(PISCA looks at the audience and shakes her head "no")*

DEMAS

*(Something catches his eye.)*

**You don't want...**

*(DEMAS suddenly darts across the stage, picks up something, and returns to FESTUS.)*

**A snake,**

*(Holding the TOY SNAKE toward PISCA.)*

**To give to him?**

TAMAR

It was a live snake. We were surprised. Snakes were common in the area, but this appeared so suddenly. Coincidentally.

FESTUS

*(Confused, shakes his head no, then yes, then no again)*

I don't want to give him no snake.

*(DEMAS playfully offered the TOY SNAKE to PISCA. PISCA reaches for it. DEMAS looks to FESTUS for approval. FESTUS shrugs and DEMAS gives the TOY SNAKE to PISCA.)*

TAMAR

*(Clapping)*

We laughed and applauded.

PISCA

*(Holds up TOY SNAKE.)*

The boy took his snake and he and his father went back into the crowd.

DEMAS

*(Addresses the audience)*

**If, when you yourselves,**

*(Studying the audience, and then shrugging.)*

**Worthless beings.**

TAMAR

We laughed at the insult. That was also part of his magic. He got us to laugh at ourselves.

DEMAS

*(Indicates departing FESTUS while addressing the audience.)*

**Have identified gifts, good ones, to give those kids of yours.**

*(Indicating PISCA.)*

**How much better will that Father of yours...**

DEMAS (cont.)

**The one in the skies...**

*(DEMAS points to the sky.)*

REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

DEMAS

**Give good things to those asking Him?**

TAMAR

This got applause, cheers and some laughter.

*(THE REST OF THE CAST claps  
and cheers, encouraging the  
audience.)*

TAMAR

Then another woman called out.

ULLA

*(From the audience)*

What about what we want from others? Their caring,  
thoughts, and attention? Can your Father in the skies  
help us with any of that?

DEMAS

**All, in fact.**

ULLA

*(From the audience)*

As much as I need?

*(Spreading her hands wide apart  
to show how much.)*

I need a lot!

DEMAS

**As much as.**

*(Spreading his hands apart to  
mimic ULLA. )*

**If you all...**

DEMAS (cont.)

*(Making a right-hand sweep  
indicating the whole crowd.)*

**Desire what they might produce for you...**

*(Making a left-hand sweep  
indicating the whole crowd.)*

**These people? So much.**

*(Spreading his hands apart to  
mimic ULLA. )*

**You yourselves...**

*(Making a right-hand sweep  
indicating the whole crowd.)*

**Must also produce for THEM.**

*(Making a left-hand sweep  
indicating the whole crowd.)*

EZRA

*(From the audience)*

Why? Why can't we just follow the law and the luminaries?

ULLA and FESTUS

*(From audience, encouraging  
others to join.)*

Why? Yes, Why?

DEMAS

**Because this IS the law and the luminaries!**

PISCA

Most of us applauded.

FESTUS

*(From the audience)*

How do we follow the path that brings us together rather than the path that leads to our destruction?

DEMAS

**Go, all of you, in through the tight gate.**

*(Indicating a narrow opening  
with his hands and pantomiming  
opening a narrow gate, trying to  
fit through it.)*

PISCA

I didn't understand it, but it made me laugh.

DEMAS

*(Stops and looks at the audience)*

**Because wide and spacious...**

*(Spreading his hand wide and pantomiming opening a wide gate.)*

**The way, the one leading into...**

*(Making the "throwing out the trash" gesture.)*

**That destruction. And many are the ones going straight through it.**

*(Making a left-hand sweep indicating the whole crowd.)*

**Because tight the gate...**

*(Putting his hands close together again.)*

**And squeezing oneself...**

*(Sucking in his gut trying to squeeze between his hands.)*

**The way, the one leading into...**

*(Making it through his hands, taking a big breath of air.)*

**The life!**

*(Sadly)*

**And, few, are**

*(Making a right-hand sweep indicating the whole crowd.)*

**The ones discovering it.**

*(Pointing upward.)*

REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.

What? The realm of the skies!

PISCA

We applauded ourselves.

TAMAR

Then lightning flashed again. Closer this time. And again, clouds darkened the sun.

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 4

AT RISE:                   The stage brightens with DEMAS handing  
the SASH to FESTUS, who puts it on.

TAMAR

Now we are heading into the big fight scene in the Sermon,  
between the Distinguished and the Teacher.

*(TAMAR goes into the audience.)*

DEMAS

It had been stewing since the group of Distinguished first  
arrived.

EZRA

And even before. The Distinguished hated the Nazarene  
from the first time he started to become known. As they  
had hated his cousin John before him.

DEMAS

This was when it came to a boil. Because of a man named  
Simeon. He was the son of one of the most powerful  
members of the Grand Council in Jerusalem.

*(DEMAS goes into the audience.)*

EZRA

The Distinguished had sat fairly quietly since the  
Nazarene's prayer, but they were upset and getting more  
upset.

ULLA

Like a swarm of angry bees, this Simeon was stirring them  
up, whispering to them, finding fault with everything the  
Teacher said.

*(DEMAS whispers to TAMAR, PISCA  
and others in the Distinguished  
section, pointing towards  
FESTUS.)*

EZRA

The sky was getting darker, threatening rain again, real  
rain, and the hour was growing late.

ULLA

If the Distinguished wanted to make a stand against the Teacher, this was the time to do it.

DEMAS

*(Angrily from the Distinguished section.)*

This fool is speaking nonsense! Another fake luminary! He is a fake like his cousin, John! They are both fake luminaries! Stay away from those fake luminaries!

ULLA

The other Distinguished joined him.

DEMAS, TAMAR, PISCA

*(From the Distinguished section.)*

Stay away from those fake luminaries!  
Stay away from those fake luminaries!  
Stay away from those fake luminaries!

ULLA

This chant dominated the gathering, but none of us in the crowd joined them despite their encouragement. Then...

FESTUS

*(Pumps his fists along with DEMAS's chants.)*

**Stay away from those fake luminaries!**

ULLA

We were confused! Was he agreeing with his accusers?

EZRA

No, he was turning it around. He was against fakes, but who were the real fakes?

ULLA

Some of us began to laugh. And then we applauded.

EZRA

And as the chant of "fake luminaries" died amid the applause, the Nazarene took over, explaining.

FESTUS

*(Smiles slyly and crouches down  
on all fours)*

**Those who make their way toward you**

*(Prowling toward the audience.)*

**In coverings of sheep...**

*(Pretending to throw something  
over himself, and bah-ing.)*

ULLA

It was as silly as anything he'd done so far.

FESTUS

*(Menacingly, touches his chest)*

**Inwardly, however, they are wolves!**

*(Pretending to throw off the  
covering and leaping at the  
audience, raking the air with his  
hands.)*

**Clawing!**

EZRA

But this young Distinguished, Simeon, confronted him.

DEMAS

*(Angrily stands before FESTUS)*

If our words claw, it is because they prick your guilty consciences. Our clawing bears fruit.

FESTUS

*(Ignores DEMAS and moves around  
him to address the audience.)*

**From those fruits of theirs?**

*(Sadly indicating DEMAS.)*

**You are going to find out about them out for yourselves.**

DEMAS

*(More angry, confronts FESTUS)*

And as you will find out, the sharper our barbs, the sweeter their fruit.

FESTUS

*(Ignores DEMAS and addresses the audience around him.)*

**By skill, do they collect from thorn bushes,**

*(Reaching out, pretending to prick himself, sucking his finger.)*

**Bunches of grapes?**

*(Pretending to hold up a bunch of grapes.)*

**Or from cacti,**

*(Reaching out, pretending to prick himself again, sucking his finger.)*

**Figs?**

*(Pretending to hold up a fig.)*

ULLA

We giggled, but this just made this man Simeon angrier.

DEMAS

*(Angrily, confronts FESTUS)*

But our fruit performs a public service.

FESTUS

*(Addresses DEMAS directly, smiling.)*

**Because every valuable tree has beautiful fruit!**

*(Speaking strongly while making a muscle.)*

**It performs!**

*(Then, speaking more sadly.)*

**However, the diseased tree has worthless fruit.**

*(Speaking theatrically.)*

**It performs!**

*(DEMAS makes vain little bows right and left.)*

ULLA

We laughed at the play on words.

EZRA

And the Nazarene's cleverness made Simeon even angrier.

DEMAS

*(Speaks threateningly,  
confronting FESTUS)*

Don't you know who I am? How dare you speak to me that way. My family is powerful!

FESTUS

*(Thoughtfully and calmly.)*

**It doesn't have the power...**

DEMAS

*(Interrupts, confronting FESTUS)*

How can you say that? We have money, influence in court, position in society, even armed guards!

EZRA

As if to demonstrate, he summoned the big guard Boaz to his side.

*(TAMAR comes to DEMAS'S side and  
makes a muscle for the audience.)*

DEMAS

*(Sneers at FESTUS)*

What power do we lack?

FESTUS

*(Calmly.)*

**To have a valuable tree bear worthless fruits...or a rotten tree create beautiful fruits.**

ULLA

Many of us applauded, hoping that our support for the Teacher would quiet this Simeon. It had the opposite effect.

PISCA

It cause the man to turn his anger on us.

DEMAS

*(Screams at the audience.)*

You applaud? Laugh? You are all breaking the law! The temple will condemn you all if you follow this madman!

*(FESTUS, DEMAS, and TAMAR play out the scene as described by the witnesses in slow motion.)*

EZRA

Now the Nazarene seemed genuinely concerned about the man, reaching out toward him. In response, this Simeon raised his fist. The guard, Boaz, reached out to restrain him from striking the Nazarene.

FESTUS

*(Expresses his concern.)*

**Every tree, not wanting to create beautiful fruit? Cuts itself off...**

ULLA

Then it all happened it just a second, but we will describe it slowly. The Teacher started making a gesture, maybe his chopping off motion, but Simeon interrupted, lunging toward him, shouting.

DEMAS

*(Screams at FESTUS)*

I'll cut you off!

EZRA

Boaz held him back, grabbing Simeon around the waist.

ULLA

But, as he did, lightening flashed. A loud crack of thunder.

EZRA

Simeon's arm came loose from Boaz's, seeming to strike the Nazarene in the face.

PISCA

The Master's head snapped back as lightning flashed again.

EZRA

Or perhaps, the Nazarene evaded the blow, snatching his head back at the last second.

ULLA

Both men fell to the ground. The Teacher backwards.  
Simeon forwards. The Nazarene's followers rushed forward.

PISCA

For a moment, it was terrifying. We all gasped and cried  
out, "No!" "No!"

EZRA

But the Nazarene instantly popped to his feet and smiled.  
He signalled his followers back. He made light of it,  
holding up his hands to quiet the crowd. Then he helped  
Simeon to his feet, signalling Boaz to let him go. The  
Nazarene smiled warmly at the man and cheerfully offered  
his other cheek.

ULLA

Simeon looked like he was considering the offer for a  
moment, balling his fist, but we all shouted, "No!"

EZRA

At the shout, Simeon looked around as if he was in a  
daze. The fight had gone out of him. The Nazarene reached  
out to take his shoulder, perhaps for an embrace, but  
Simeon pulled away. Boaz helped him back among the other  
Distinguished.

FESTUS

*(Sadly, summarizes the event.)*

**And into the fire, he tosses himself.**

*(Sadly making the throwing out  
the trash gesture.)*

ULLA

That throwing-out-the-trash gesture lightened the mood,  
but we were all shook up.

EZRA

This line about cutting down trees and casting them  
into the fire was originally from John, the Nazarene's  
cousin. This condemnation referred to tree of Abraham  
being replaced by the Divine. Simeon may have struck  
at the Nazarene because he recognized it before it was  
completed.

DEMAS

*(Comes to the stage and explains.)*

Some of the younger Distinguished also wanted to physically restrain the Nazarene, maybe take him prisoner to Jerusalem, but we knew the crowd wouldn't allow it. Our wiser heads prevailed. Instead, the elders decided that we would walkout.

ULLA

Everything was in turmoil as the Distinguished rose up and began to leave. We didn't know what was happening.

DEMAS

Personally, I still wanted to hear what else the Nazarene had to say, so I told my elder that I would stay to report what happened.

TAMAR

And as we realized that the Distinguished were leaving, most of us were happy to see them go. As they walked out, the Master offered a final observation, repeating an earlier idea.

FESTUS

*(Smiling sadly.)*

**Watch! From those fruits of theirs? You are going to find out about them for yourselves!**

EZRA

Then, someone started clapping. We were applauding the fact that the Distinguished were leaving.

*(Clapping, EZRA goes into the audience.)*

ULLA

*(Clapping)*

We were applauding the victory of the Nazarene over the Distinguished. Victory by offering his cheek. More and more people were clapping.

PISCA

*(Clapping)*

Then everyone was clapping.

*(PISCA goes into the audience.)*

TAMAR

*(Clapping)*

The crowd began bowing toward the Teacher and began shouting his praises.

PISCA

*(From the audience)*

You are our new master!

EZRA

*(From the audience.)*

Lead us, Master! We trust only in you!

DEMAS

*(From the audience)*

Master! We will be saved if we just trust in you, won't we?

FESTUS

*(Smiling, shakes his head sadly)*

**Not every one saying to me,**

*(Using a subservient voice.)*

**"Master! Master!"**

*(Giving a groveling bow.)*

ULLA

The funny voice and bow made many of us laugh.

FESTUS

**Is going to get himself...**

*(Pointing up.)*

**Into the realm of the skies!**

REST OF THE CAST

*(Encouraging the audience)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

TAMAR

The Teacher then gave a sign to his followers and they repeated another verse from the sayings of our oldest luminary, Moses.

REST OF CAST

You have a Master, that Divine of yours. You will bow down  
and him alone will you serve.

EZRA

*(From the audience.)*

Who WILL get into the realm of the skies?

FESTUS

**Only the one serving that purpose of that Father of mine!**

*(Smiling.)*

**The one in the skies!**

*(Pointing up.)*

REST OF THE CAST

*(Encouraging the audience)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

ULLA

And we laughed happily as we joined in.

EZRA

*(Clapping)*

And applauded.

ULLA

Our mood brightened with the departure of the  
Distinguished, but the sky was getting darker. Lightning  
flashed overhead again. Then someone called out.

TAMAR

*(From the audience)*

Won't others, like the Distinguished, appoint themselves  
to enforce this new teaching?

DEMAS

*(From the audience.)*

Claiming to act in your name as the Distinguished say  
they act in the name of Moses?

ULLA

We booed that idea.

EZRA

But the Teacher surprised us by nodding his agreement.

FESTUS

**Many are going to say to me on that day,**

*(Fawning voice.)*

**"Master! Master! Didn't we, by your name,**

*(Giving a groveling bow)*

**Act as luminaries?**

*(waving his hands.)*

**And, by your name,**

*(Giving a groveling bow)*

**Personal demons? We tossed them out!**

*(Making the throwing out the trash motion.)*

**And, by your name,**

*(Giving a groveling bow)*

**Abilities? Many, we produced!**

ULLA

The sky got even darker. The lightning flashed again.

*(LIGHTS flash.)*

FESTUS

**And, at that time, I am going to say the same thing to them.**

*(Putting one hand on his hip and shaking his finger as if scolding a child.)*

**Since I never ever recognized you, you all are cut off from me...**

*(Chopping.)*

**You self-employed workers in immorality.**

*(LIGHTS flash to emulate lightning.)*

EZRA

And at that, the black clouds of the storm rolled over us.

*(LIGHTS flash.)*

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 5

AT RISE:                   FESTUS passes the SASH to TAMAR.

FESTUS

Which brings us to the only story the man told that day.

TAMAR

My father and I saw the Teacher speak several more times. Some things he repeated, like beginning by calling different groups, "Lucky!" But every time we saw him, he added more stories.

DEMAS

And, more of those stories were acted out. He would narrate, saying all the lines, but his students would act in them.

FESTUS

But that day, early in his career, he did all his own acting. And this story was his last act.

DEMAS

And we sensed it. We could see the rain over the sea. Summer lightning was flashing all around.

ULLA

The crowd was restless. The weather was coming our way. But we were also sad. We would soon be leaving. It had been a special day. We didn't want it to end.

PISCA

My mother and I were specially sad. We would soon be out in the rain. Alone.

FESTUS

A man called out a question. As it turned out, the last of the day.

EZRA

*(From the audience)*

Are your ideas practical given all the problems in the world?

PISCA

*(Clapping)*

We applauded the question.

TAMAR

*(TAMAR puts on the SASH.)***Everyone, in fact, anyone, who listens to these ideas of mine, and...***(TAMAR taps her temple.)***Uses them. He is going to be compared to...***(Rubbing her chin.)***A practical person! Who constructed his house on a rocky height.***(Pointing to audience left.)*

FESTUS

The Master pointed toward a rock cliff on our left. There was a flash of lightning as he did.

*(LIGHTS flash to audience left.)*

TAMAR

*(With a shrug.)***And, it fell down.**

FESTUS

He said it like it was the end of the story.

ULLA

Most of us laughed. But then he gestured toward the rain.

TAMAR

*(Clarifying.)***The rain!**

PISCA

We all laughed at the correction. Then he gestured toward the beach below.

TAMAR

*(Sourly, gestures toward sea.)***And they showed up...**

DEMAS

Following his gesture towards the shore, we saw the Distinguished, boarding their boat among crashing waves.

ULLA

We groaned.

FESTUS

In my head, I imagined a group of Distinguished showing up at my house during a rain storm.  
(*Shudders.*)

TAMAR

(*Clarifying, gestures a crashing wave.*)

**The floods! And they blew...**

(*Blowing.*)

FESTUS

(*Suspiciously*)

Who blew? We expected another twist.

TAMAR

(*Indicates the sky.*)

**The winds.**

(*Gesturing to illustrate the wind.*)

ULLA

Which got another laugh. A nervous one since the wind rose as he said it.

TAMAR

(*Grabs an imaginary object and shakes it.*)

**And they fell against that house, and...**

(*Standing silently then shouting loudly.*)

**No!**

(*THE REST OF THE CAST jumps.*)

PISCA

The shout made us all jumped.

DEMAS

He pointed solemnly up toward the cliff and its imaginary house.

TAMAR

*(Slowing lifting her finger to point to the audience left.)*

**It. Does. Not. Fall!**

*(Holding her position.)*

**Because?**

*(Pointing down at the ROCK near her feet.)*

**It was built. On. Rock.**

FESTUS

We laughed.

PISCA

*(Clapping.)*

Then we applauded.

TAMAR

**And each one listening to my ideas and not wanting to use them?**

*(Shaking her head sadly.)*

**He is going to be compared to a stupid person:**

*(Making a foolish face and staring at the audience.)*

**Who constructed his house on a sandy beach.**

*(Pointing to audience right.)*

PISCA

He pointed down toward the beach.

DEMAS

We could still see my Distinguished boarding their boat below.

EZRA

Funny coincidence.

TAMAR

**And, it came down.**

PISCA

We knew what was coming. But a few drops of warm rain were also starting to fall.

TAMAR

*(Calmly, indicating the sky.)*

**The rain! And they showed up...**

*(Indicating a crashing wave.)*

**The floods!**

PISCA

We could still see the waves crashing below as the Distinguished tried to launch their boat.

TAMAR

*(Puffing out her cheek.)*

**And they blew...the winds.**

PISCA

And the wind picked up more around us.

TAMAR

*(Makes a wind gesture.)*

**And they fell against that house**

*(Grabbing and shaking.)*

**That one!**

*(Pointing down toward the audience right.)*

**And?**

*(Pretending to struggle against a wind, blown this way and that.)*

ULLA

We all got quiet. The wind was blowing harder, but the Teacher's struggles against it were exaggerated. It was raining.

FESTUS

Lightning flashed. Thunder rumbled.

PISCA

Most of us had come to think that he was controlling the wind and weather. It was a little frightening. I clung to my mother.

*(TAMAR is blown from one foot to another, wind milling her arms, teetering at last on one.)*

FESTUS

The Master pretended he was trying to keep his balance, but it was for show. The wind wasn't blowing that hard.

*(TAMAR teeters on one foot.)*

EZRA

The Nazarene began falling.

FESTUS

So very slowly!

ULLA

We began tittering. He was making it comical.

DEMAS

A big flash of lightning. A clap of thunder overhead.

*(TAMAR gets a look of panic on her face. She windmills her arms faster to keep her balance.)*

EZRA

Then another flash. Another crash of thunder!

TAMAR

*(Opens her eyes wide.)*

**It fellllllll!**

*(Drawing out her shout as she falls backward.)*

PISCA

We all laughed and applauded

DEMAS

The rain began to fall steadily.

ULLA

But it was just a warm drizzle.

FESTUS

The Nazarene quickly popped back up.

TAMAR

*(Pops up and dusting off.)*

**And, it was, the crash of it?**

*(Savoring the words)*

**Huge!**

PISCA

Then we began applauding.

*(REST OF CAST starts clapping.)*

EZRA

More rain began falling. The gathering was clearly over.

DEMAS

Then the Nazarene started embracing the people around him.

PISCA

The Master hugged me and my mother again.

EZRA

Then the Nazarene pointed to the sky.

REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.  
What? The realm of the skies!

TAMAR

*(Removing SASH.)*

Most of us tried to get near the Teacher. To meet him.  
But the crowd around him wasn't moving.

DEMAS

And it started to rain harder.

ULLA

Most of us headed out, toward some sheltering groves  
nearer the shore.

TAMAR

And as we departed, each in our group, the chant continued.

FESTUS

Most of us chanted along.

REST OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.

What? The realm of the skies!

Change your minds! It has gotten near.

What? The realm of the skies!

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF SCENE)

SCENE 6

AT RISE:                   Lights come up with the entire cast on stage.

FESTUS

And that was what it was like that day. Within our poor power to recreate it.

TAMAR

Afterwards, we all went back to our lives, but with our minds changed. My father became an active follower and supporter of the Teacher and later, his heralds, the Ones Sent. I gave up my charity work, but my father encouraged me to offer my testimony about the Teacher to others. He supported our whole group and our travels until his death last year. He left me an inheritance so we could continue our mission.

EZRA

I went back to the Observers, but I resigned my role as their leader, renouncing all my vows. With others in our community, I began collecting the sayings of the Nazarene and copying them instead of the ancient works. Tamar's father gave us a copy of Quintus's record of the sermon. Since I joined her, our travels have allowed me to collect other sayings of the Nazarene. I send them back to my community. Without my leadership, they have gone from poor to prosperous.

DEMAS

I completed my studies to become a lawyer, but I found that I had lost interest in the letter of the law. I was greatly saddened when I heard of the Nazarene's death. Most of the other Distinguished celebrated. I couldn't. Then we heard that he was raised from the dead, and I became a follower, secretly, in my heart. I declined the opportunity to marry my master's daughter. Instead, I invented the job of spying for the Distinguished among the followers. Then I met Tamar and one thing led to another. We were married. The Distinguished fired me as a spy.

*(DEMAS takes TAMAR's hand and they smile at each other.)*

## TAMAR

And Demas has proven to have a head for business, taking over my father's enterprises. He and Ezra also set up a new business distributing and selling copies of the Teacher's sayings. This is what has made Ezra's community prosperous.

## ULLA

I went back to my fishing village, and being a widow and grandmother. But now I had a new hunger for life. The appeal of fish is much overrated. When Tamar, Demas, and Ezra came to our village, I asked to join them. And the whole world has opened up to me since in a new life. The only thing I miss about my old life is my grandchildren. But we get back to Galilee now and again so I still get to see them grow up. And, they are excited to have a new grandpa who renounced his silly vow of celibacy.

*(EZRA takes ULLA's hand.)*

## FESTUS

And I was so impressed by the Master's performance, I immediately wanted to become an actor. How is that for getting it all wrong? Did I mention that I drank too much? I joined a traveling troupe of actors. My parents grieved for me as if I had died. And they were right: actors are, generally speaking, horrible people. But, on the road, we met Tamar's group and, seeing them, I remembered and changed. I joined them. Now, however, much to my parent's joy, I have now become an apprentice copyist, copying the sayings Ezra collects. My parents even send me money for copies of the Nazarene's sayings. They have become followers themselves. It is quite fashionable among our set. They are happy that I have moved from pursuing pleasure to pursuing responsibility.

## PISCA

And of course, both my mother and I were cured. Tah-DAH! No sores! Though we didn't realize we had been cured for days, when the sores began to fade. It was, of course, what we had prayed for. We returned to my father and our tribe of sheep herders. My father hadn't divorced my mother. We had a home again. My mother gave birth to my baby brother, a spotless, vision of the divine. Because we had been cured by the Master, we became local celebrities. Mother and I had described the experience

many times to others. When we heard the Nazarene had died and been raised, we became followers. We saw Tamar's group's performance, using Festus's idea of recreating the event, and it was like being with the Master again. I immediately wanted to join them. Living that day over and over. But my parents refused. It was improper for an unmarried girl. Then Ulla had an evil idea and introduced me to Festus.

*(PISCA takes FESTUS's hand.)*

FESTUS

And we hated each other at first sight. An educated Greek and a Judean goat girl? We were like oil and water.

PISCA

Oily oil and pure, clean water. As much as I liked the rest of Tamar's group? That is how much I couldn't stand the pompous, egotistical Festus.

TAMAR

And when we saw how strongly they felt about each other, we knew it was inevitable.

DEMAS

Not me, I thought the women were crazy to think they could make it work. I still have a hard time believing in magic.

PISCA

But I was so sick of sheep. As Festus knows, my people herd sheep, not goats. He says goats to tease me, but he barely knows the difference between the two, except by flavor. He was funny and made me laugh. Every since seeing the Master, I do so love to laugh.

ULLA

We all do.

FESTUS

And I never met any city girls that laughed at my jokes like she did. They all have to be so sophisticated you know. So full of themselves. Pisca was so down to earth and humble. As different from city girls as a lamb is from a goat. It made her interesting. We found ourselves

FESTUS (cont.)

spending our time together whenever we could. If only to insult one another and irritate her parents.

PISCA

My parents didn't approve of us at all. He had been an actor. The lowest sort of scum. The more they attacked him, the more I defended him. Festus was a follower now, like they were. He wasn't an actor, but a great storyteller. But the more I defended him, the more they disapproved. It wasn't like I could ever marry him, they said. He wasn't a Judean. I should be spending time with boys with whom I could make a life.

ULLA

So, it was Pisca's parents who raised the issue of marriage, not me or Tamar. I do love it when a plan comes together!

PISCA

And I really hadn't even thought about marriage until my parents brought it up, arguing against it. To marry me, Festus would have to convert.

FESTUS

Do you know what Judean conversion requires? For an adult male?

*(Makes a snipping motion and then shudders.)*

But there is a romantic nobility in that kind of sacrifice. It was the type of grand gesture that had always appealed to me. I found myself wanting to do it to prove something to Pisca both about myself and about how I felt about her.

PISCA

And I couldn't believe he was willing when he asked me to marry him. It was kind of gross, but also the most romantic thing I'd ever heard.

TAMAR

But among our people, marriages are arranged between the parents. Ezra, as Festus's master, talked to Festus's parents. They were anxious to see Festus settle down.

ULLA

And Pisca's parents couldn't object. Not if Festus was willing to demonstrate such devotion to their daughter. Ezra and Tamar worked out the marriage contract with Pisca's parents and Festus's. Demas did the legal work.

FESTUS

And I did the hard part!

PISCA

And now Festus and I are expecting our own spotless, vision of the divine.

*(Patting her belly.)*

TAMAR

Thank you all for inviting us to tell you our story. Tell others about us. And remember, as the Teacher says:

*(TAMAR points to the sky.)*

ALL OF THE CAST

Change your minds! It has gotten near.

What? The realm of the skies!

*(ALL OF THE CAST points to the sky together.)*

Change your minds! It has gotten near.

What? The realm of the skies!

(FADE TO BLACK)

(END OF ACT)

(END OF PLAY)

## Jesus's Words in This Work

This work demonstrates how entertaining Jesus was as a teacher. It grew out of over a decade of daily effort translating the words of Jesus from the original ancient Greek. What I found was full of humor, wordplay, double meanings, and even rhymes. It is difficult to describe what Jesus's words are like. Humor can't be reduced to explanations. Hearing Jesus speak would have been very entertaining, and his words should still entertain us today.

The translation used here is different than most standard English translations. It follows the original Greek almost word-by-word. Biblical translation renders Jesus's spoken words into proper written English sentences. This work assumes Jesus's words were spoken. The goal is to present how Jesus spoke and how he would have sounded to people of his time.

Unlike most Biblical translations, this version does not rearrange phrases so they sound like they were written as opposed to spoken. Nor does it add words to explain what Jesus may have meant. It offers the words, as much as possible, in the order they were spoken. The meaning of those words is shaped by the fictional context, the questions asked, rather than changing the words themselves. The context was created based upon the words as recorded.

As spoken, Jesus's words are often clearly meant to make people laugh. Greek sentence structure puts the most important words first. However, all humor, in every language, has the punch lines at the end of phrases. This structure is necessary to create surprise and make us laugh. Jesus habitually puts key words at the end of phrases.

Do not be surprised if many familiar verses are difficult to find here. There is no "love your enemy" for example. Different Greek words are translated as "love" in the Gospels and none of them are much like our English word, "love". One means "embrace". Another means "welcome". This translation uses the primary meaning of the Greek words, not their religious or philosophical interpretations.

If any of Jesus's lines seem cumbersome--and some will--think

of their possibilities for humor. They can be smoothed out in rewriting, but the initial goal is to let the players find the humor in the original, as we find humor in Shakespeare lines. If we fixed Henny Youngman's, "Take my wife...please" into the more grammatical, "Please...take my wife", we would never find the humor in it.

To view the research into the Greek for specific verses, go to <http://christswords.com/witness-list/>. This list links to the individual articles that explain Greek verse.

The words themselves dictated the events in this play. Some of these elements are visible in English translation. For example, in the Sermon there are many sudden shifts in the topic. The events in the play explain this simply. Questions from the audience drive most topic changes. The questions are in context, so the changes in topic flow naturally.

Some of the elements dictating the play's events cannot be seen in English translation. For example, there are shifts in Greek from the plural "you" to the singular "you". In the play, this is captured by Jesus shifting from addressing the audience to talking to an individual. The text also has places where Jesus seems to be repeating questions, but, in translation, the questions are turned into statements.

There are also many words that are changed in translation because they don't make sense without the larger context. For example, in English translation those who mourn are "comforted", while in the Greek, those who mourn are being "called upon" or "called near". This, however, is confusing. "Called near" to what? Where? In the play, the context is provided to explain that meaning.

Finally, many of Jesus's words are highly descriptive of actions, inviting the sense they were acted out. Some of this active nature is hidden by translation, making the words seem more philosophical. For example, the word meaning "embrace" is translated as "love", and the word meaning "tripped up" is translated as "being offended". The originals are more easily acted out in a humorous way. If we assume Jesus acted out his words, some of the sayings that seem ridiculously harsh, even crazy, such as plucking out eyes, and chopping off hands, are just entertaining exaggerations.

Production Notes

**Audience Participation:** The audience should be encouraged to join into the production. This primarily means getting the audience to join the cast in the "realm of the skies" chorus and encouraging them to applaud where the crowd at the original sermon applauded. The players can get various parts of the audience to play different roles as well. In this version, only the Distinguished section is clearly identified, but the play is designed to that there can be parts for other audience sections as well: followers, foreigners, outcasts, ascetics, and so on.

**Laughter:** The most difficult aspect of the play is laughter. You can direct an audience to applaud, but not to laugh. There are many lines describing the audience laughing during the original sermon, but these can be dropped or added. These lines are more numerous during the beginning of the play. Their purpose is to let the audience know that it is okay to laugh and, ideally, get them laughing. Of course, audiences and performances differ. If the audience is laughing during a performance, these lines can be dropped or changed to "We laughed too!" lines. If the audience isn't laughing, the players can add more "we laughed" lines, and even make a joke of the audience not laughing.

**Player Skills:** The witnesses in the play are not skilled actors and they are proud of it. This means that the actors playing their roles can be amateurs as well. They are allowed a certain amount of clumsiness. Even the recognition of their mistakes by others in the play should work well. However, skilled actors can change their voice and play different characters from the audience. The play is also designed so the number of characters can be increased or decreased by reassigning lines. I have done this constantly in writing the play. It originally started with twelve characters instead of its current six.

**Acting out Words** The words Jesus uses often describe actions. These words are meant to be acted out. Descriptions of such actions are provided more in the first act, especially when the same actions are used later in the play. However, as the play goes on, the stage direction is simply, "Acting out his words". This action should always be humorous and entertaining. Clumsiness also works here.