

# Sunday Morning Quarterback

A staged reading or play based on Matthew 11:1-30

Common Lectionary July 8, 2008: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

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Jesus has been going from town to town doing his very best with very difficult people. They won't believe him and reject him. Even John the Baptist hears the worst and now wonders if Jesus is the person that he thought he was.

Jesus parades them before us: The spectators who never take part in anything. The armchair quarterbacks who analyze but never play the game. The wise who are locked into lofty enigmas with no logical answer, so they can never believe. Those looking for a temporary pastime to amuse them for a time, but never become engaged. Those biased by politics and worldly ways. Those who judge by appearances, but never look at the heart or deeds. Would they recognize a bird if it landed on their arm? The invitation is open for a light load if they could only allow themselves to accept.

## Key concepts:

1. Belief is not a mental game, a pastime, nor subject to people's understanding and criticism.
2. The mysteries of God are understood by experiencing God's ways.
3. Christ is gentle, carries our burdens, and will help us understand God's ways.

As a staged reading this is presented with minimal props, minimal action, and lines may be read aloud. As a short play, minimal props are required.

This play does not include a children's sermon.

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## Props for *Monday Morning Quarterback*

Glass of water. (May or may not have water.)

## Cast

Claude: The message bearer.

Jeffrey: The science and philosophy elitist.

Jane: The one only looking for entertainment.

Charley: The independent one.

Sarah: The one who can believe in nothing beyond herself.

O'Brian: The one who only wants to go his own way.

## Setting

A seminar in a contemporary setting, with characters of any age.

**Time:** Present day, timeless.

## Blocking

Claudee stands to stage right with a glass of water, facing the characters but able to be seen by the audience. The other characters sit center stage facing the audience, but able to see Claudee.

## Costumes

Today's casual contemporary attire - no other costumes are necessary.

## Music

## Playing time

Approximately 3 minutes.

## Children's Sermon

**Props:**

None.

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ACT 1 (of 1)

CLAUDE STANDS BEFORE A GROUP OF PEOPLE WITH A GLASS OF WATER.

CLAUDE

Thank-you for coming. Today I'm going to offer you a simple glass of water. It will change your life.

SOME IN THE AUDIENCE SNORT AND HUMPH IN CONTEMPT.

CLAUDE

Seriously. All you have to do is drink this water.

JEFFRY WALKS OVER AND TAKES THE GLASS; LOOKS AT IT; SNIFFS IT.

JEFFRY

It is scientifically impossible for a plain glass of water to change your life.

JEFFRY RETURNS TO HIS SEAT.

O'BRIAN

What's the catch, mister? Are you some kind of huckster.

CHARLEY

Yeah, didn't I see you at the tavern yesterday with a bunch of drunks.

O'BRIAN

There was a prostitute at your table, too, and a bunch of other types of people that I don't like. I suppose you sold her a glass of water.

CLAUDE

I did. What I'm telling you, you can believe. This glass of water represents God. He will change your life.

SARAH

All we have to do is drink it? Go ahead, drink it. I want to see if you turn green, or die, or something.

CLAUDE

Well, it's a little amusing, isn't it. To think that a glass of water could change your life. So what if I sprinkle powdered gold into it, and make it bubble and fizz and turn color. Would that impress you?

SARAH

That would make it worth something - the price of gold is up. Go ahead, give me that glass with gold in it and I will take it home and separate it.

CLAUDE

What if I pour it on a person who is dead and he comes back to life?

JANE

That would be fun!

JEFFREY

Nah. Magicians tricks. I wouldn't believe it even if you had a death certificate from a doctor. Next you'll be catching bullets in your teeth.

CLAUDE

So if I offer you the unvarnished truth, you are bored and don't want to hear it. If I do the most fantastic wonders, you think it's a fraud?

JANE

I'm leaving. This is a sham!

STANDS

CLAUDE

Is a better life not enough? Eternal life?

JANE

My psychologist gives me a better life every week. And who knows about eternal life. Dead is dead.

JANE LEAVES WITH AN ANGRY AND CONTEMPTUOUS AIRE.

CLAUDE

(Calls after Jane.)

What if you didn't need a therapist?

JANE

She's my lifeline. And you want me to get rid of her? You're nuts.

JANE LEAVES.

CHARLEY

Just how would God make our lives better?

CLAUDE

You would have better relationships, fewer problems that you bring on yourself, and even fewer enemies.

CHARLEY

I can take care of myself. I'm smarter and faster than my enemies.

CLAUDE

And you probably work yourself to death and worry yourself sick.

CHARLEY

Yeah, well, I don't get took.

JEFFREY

Let's call this what it is. Positive thinking. Positive thinking doesn't work. It's a fairy tale.

SARAH

Aren't you going to do entertain us? I'm bored with this.

O'BRIAN

I'm philosophically opposed to your view, mister. This is for wimps! A swift kick in the rear fixes most problems.

Claude

But there is an easier way. Love.

O'BRIAN

I believe in an eye for an eye. And I vote for people who share the same view. And I associate with religious people that believe the same. This just goes completely against the grain for me.

CLAUDE

Have you never done anything wrong?

O'BRIAN

Of course. Nobody is perfect.

CLAUDE

Which eye did it cost you?

O'BRIAN STORMS OUT MUTTERING.

O'BRIAN

I've heard enough of this nonsense.



SARAH

I'm a good enough person. Drink your own water.

SARAH LEAVES. CHARLEY RISES.

CLAUDE

(Calls after Sarah.)

I can provide testimony from thousands who have tried this and it works?

SARAH DOESN'T RESPOND.

CHARLEY

"A sucker is born every minute." - P.T. Barnum.

CHARLEY FOLLOWS SARAH OUT.

JEFFREY

Look around you, man. All of the religious people in the world just make war on each other – it's been this way from the beginning of time. They're all hypocrits, judging everyone and doing just the opposite of what they say. They are troublemakers, not peacemakers. Can't you see this religion stuff is all nonsense promoted by people who want to control us. My 10 year old kid could do a better job of running the world. No one believes this nonsense. Hear the buzzer? it's game over.

JEFFREY LEAVES AS CLAUDE TALKS.

CLAUDE

CLAUDE IS ANGRY.

I bring you something good and you won't even try. You turn away from God and bring the worst to yourselves. All you want is to be entertained and argue and do things your own way. You only hear what you want to hear! Nothing means anything to you. How can I reach you?

(Continued.)

CLAUDE

What do you have to lose? God can relieve your troubles, help carry your load, make your relationships better, your entire life will get better – all things that are really really important - and at the end you have been forgiven and have eternal life. All you have to do is try God's way.

DISAPPOINTED, HE POURS THE WATER ON THE GROUND.

## Scriptures quoted (NIV)

Matthew 11 New International Version (NIV)

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Matthew 11

### Jesus and John the Baptist

1 After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

2 When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. 6 Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

7 As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 8 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. 9 Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written:

" 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' 11 I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. 14 And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. 15 He who has ears, let him hear.

16 "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

17 " 'We played the flute for you,  
and you did not dance;  
we sang a dirge  
and you did not mourn.'

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners."' But wisdom is proved right by her actions."

### Woe on Unrepentant Cities

20 Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I tell you, it will be more

bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. 24 But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."

### **Rest for the Weary**

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.

27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."