

GRAIN AND BAGGAGE

Ted Swartz with workshop participants
Laurelville Music and Worship Weekend 2009

Characters: Judge, Bailiff, 5 people for the chorus, Jesus, man with withered hand,
3 defendants (Skowlin, Marcus, Jeff)

Scripture text: Matthew 12:1-14

Props: Table/high desk for judge—chairs/stools for chorus. Gavel. Sturdy hardcase
suitcase. 2 kites.

Length: 10 minutes

Setting: A courtroom; there is also a “Greek Chorus” style gathering either stage left or
right.

BALIFF: All rise! Seriously all rise. This court is now in session, the honorable
Judge Nafzinger (*or the name of your actor*) presiding.

(JUDGE enters in robes.)

JUDGE: Call the first case.

BALIFF: Court vs Bartok and Skowlin.

(Two people come in carrying kites.)

JUDGE: Kites. ... (*Quoting from the law.*) Chapter 11. “These are the birds you are
to detest and not eat because they are detestable: the eagle, the vulture,
the black vulture, the red kite, the black kite, the raven, the horned owl,
the screech owl, the gull, any kind of hawk, the little owl, the great owl,
the white owl, the desert owl, the osprey, the stork, the heron, the hoopoe
and the bat.”

CHORUS 1: Did she say bat?

CHORUS 2: Yes.

CHORUS 1: Bat’s not a bird.

CHORUS 2: Hush.

CHORUS 1: You ever eat a bat?

CHORUS 2: No.

CHORUS 1: I don’t think you can even debone a bat.

CHORUS 2: Shh.

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1

JUDGE: What is your intent with these kites?

BARTOK: Flying.

JUDGE: Fine ... and you.

SKOWLIN: *(A pause.)* Eating.

JUDGE: *(Bangs the gavel.)* That's it! Bailiff, take his kite away—you are declared unclean—required to sacrifice a female goat without blemish six consecutive days. Next.

SKOWLIN: How can you sacrifice the same goat six times?

JUDGE: Different goats!!

BALIFF: Court vs Marcus son of Malachi.

(MARCUS steps forward.)

JUDGE: *(Reads for a short time, looks up.)* You are aware the law of Moses speaks very clearly on this issue?

MARCUS: Well, yes...

JUDGE: You knew there was mildew in the house?

MARCUS: I thought it was last week's lentil soup gone bad.

JUDGE: This is the third time.

MARCUS: I guess.

JUDGE: Mildew.

MARCUS: Could be limestone?

JUDGE: *(Bangs the gavel.)* This house is declared unclean. It must be torn down—its stones, timbers and all the plaster—and taken out of the town to an unclean place. And the shoes gotta go.

MARCUS: What?

JUDGE: Right now.

(MARCUS takes off his shoes; exits.)

JUDGE: Next case.

(JEFF enters in very bad clothing.)

JUDGE: *(Looks at him.)* I don't know where to start.

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BALIFF: Gotta be a textile violation your honor.

JUDGE: Mixing of textiles, mixing of eras, mixing of taste. Sacrifice two pigeons— and think about hiring a fashion consultant.

JEFF: Unblemished?

JUDGE: Doesn't matter.

JUDGE: Next?

BALIFF: Council vs. John, James sons of Zebedee, Peter, Bartholemew, Andrew, Judas, Thomas, Judas Iscariot, Simon, Matthew, Phillip, James son of Alphias ... Jesus, son of Joseph.

JUDGE: And the charges again these men?

BALIFF: It shall be known that John, Peter, Bartholomew, Andrew, Judas, Thomas, Simon, Matthew...

JUDGE: Baliff...

BALIFF: Yes?

JUDGE: Is there another way we can identify these defendants?

BALIFF: Why?

JUDGE: We can't be here all day.

BALIFF: The disciples of Jesus?

JUDGE: Let's go with that.

BALIFF: Council vs. the disciples of Jesus.

JUDGE: Is he here?

BALIFF: Who?

JUDGE: Jesus!

JESUS: Here. *(Original performance had a tall African American woman in the role— depending on your audience you can go with that—I would suggest something unexpected. If you use a man, of course you use the pronoun "he".)*

CHORUS 3: She looks different than I imagined.

CHORUS 4: How so?

CHORUS 3: She's taller ... great ear rings.

JUDGE: Welcome back, Jesus. We've missed you.

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JESUS: Thank you.

JUDGE: Read the charges!

BALIFF: These men, hereafter to be known as the disciples of Jesus, included said self proclaimed son of man, did with intent, traipse through a wheat field, on the fourth day of this month, where he was observed plucking heads.

JUDGE: Plucking?

BALIFF: ...Yes.

JUDGE: Plucking. Uh huh.

(Writes it down. Waves BAILIFF to continue.)

BALIFF: Plucking verily the heads of the grains, with intent to consume ... on the Sabbath.

(Gasps of outrage from the CHORUS. During these outbursts they almost function like a single character.)

CHORUS: Sabbath! I've seen them, unbelievable! It's an outrage, did you say sabbath, unheard of, terrible ... *(General hubbub...)*

JUDGE: Quiet ... quiet.

CHORUS 1: Hubbub / sabbath...

JUDGE: *(One last bang of the gavel—points at the “hubbabber”. Then back to JESUS.)*
How do you plead?

JESUS: You're serious?

JUDGE: I assure you, my young friend—if it's one thing I am, it's serious.

JESUS: We were hungry ... when you are hungry, you need to eat.

CHORUS 5: She's right.

CHORUS 1: Shhh.

CHORUS 5: I like her.

JESUS: There was work to be done.

CHORUS 5: She's right ... work to be done.

CHORUS 1: Shhh.

JUDGE: The needs of your ragged band of grain plucking hooligans does NOT take precedent over the law.

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JESUS: Have you never read the scriptures? Do you not know...

JUDGE: ...have I never read the scriptures?! Do I not know... is that what you've asked?

JESUS: I believe so, yes.

JUDGE: Have I ... Bring out the suitcase! (*The Holy suitcase is brought forth, as to be like the Holy Grail—angel voices from the chorus*) You know the suitcase?

JESUS: Of course.

JUDGE: Open the suitcase!

(When the suitcase is open, the voices begin—a cacophony of lines—reflecting the law. This is not unison, but words rolling over each. Choose from these below or others from the law of Moses: Leviticus.)

CHORUS: Say to the Israelites: 'Of all the animals that live on land, these are the ones you may eat. You may eat any animal that has a split hoof completely divided and that chews the cud.

"There are some that only chew the cud or only have a split hoof, but you must not eat them. The camel, though it chews the cud, does not have a split hoof; it is ceremonially unclean for you. They are unclean, and you are to regard them as unclean. A spring, however, or a cistern for collecting water remains clean, but anyone who touches one of these carcasses is unclean.

If a carcass falls on any seeds that are to be planted, they remain clean. But if water has been put on the seed and a carcass falls on it, it is unclean for you."When a man has lost his hair and is bald, he is clean. If he has lost his hair from the front of his scalp and has a bald forehead, he is clean. But if he has a reddish-white sore on his bald head or forehead, it is an infectious disease breaking out on his head or forehead.

Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am the LORD your God.

'When you sacrifice a fellowship offering [a] to the LORD, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. It shall be eaten on the day you sacrifice it or on the next day; anything left over until the third day must be burned up. If any of it is eaten on the third day, it is impure and will not be accepted.

Whoever eats it will be held responsible because he has desecrated what is holy to the LORD; that CHORUS must be cut off from his people.

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your

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vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.”

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6

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(BAILIFF closes the suitcase on the signal from JUDGE, opens and shuts—playing with the options—the words grow louder when it is opened wide, softer when closing—silent when closed— BAILIFF should feel free to play with the other actors—but needs to close ultimately.)

JUDGE: Oh yes ... I know. You were saying?

JESUS: Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God...

CHORUS 2: *(Excited.)* I know this, he went to the house of God and ate the bread of the...

(JUDGE is now looking at him/her. CHORUS 2 trails off.)

JESUS: He ate the bread of the Presence, which is not allowed...

JUDGE: Except for the priests.

JESUS: Except for the priests.

JUDGE: It's a pretty plain law---the Sabbath is clearly defined...

JESUS: Yes...

JUDGE: Having to do with the loss of light until light once again appears.

JESUS: Yes...

JUDGE: Simple ... dark and light ... almost ---black and white.

JESUS: The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath...

(JUDGE motions and the BAILIFF raises the lid to the suitcase, voices rise until JESUS is competing with the chorus.)

JESUS: ... so the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath ... for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath...

(The voices grow louder. JESUS is frustrated, stops—BAILIFF closes the lid, voices stop. JESUS looks out into the audience.)

JESUS: You there.

MAN: *(Stands—he has a hand in his pocket.)* Me?

JESUS: Yes, come here.

MAN: Why?

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JESUS: Just come.

MAN: I don't think so, I'd rather just stay here.

JESUS: If you would be so kind as to please...

(Motions with an inviting motion.)

MAN: I appreciate the offer but, I think I'll just...

JESUS: Come here!

MAN: *(Immediately.)* OK.

(He comes forward.)

JESUS: Stretch out you hand.

MAN: Actually I'd rather...

JESUS: Stretch it out!

MAN: OK.

(Somewhat reluctantly extends his hand; his hand is curled and bent.)

JESUS: Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill it? ... Which is it? ... Which is it? *(JUDGE nods to the BAILIFF, who begins to raise the suitcase, the voices start—JESUS bangs down the lid—voices abruptly stop.)* Which is it?!

(JESUS turns to the man, looks him in the eye while she takes his hand—a smile, when she takes her hand away, it is straightened—there is general hubbub again—JESUS is the one who looks at the chorus, they hush up—JESUS goes to the suitcase, picks it up, tucks it under her arm and exits.)

THE END

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8

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9

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