



CIRCUMSCHISM

By Roger Stroud

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SYNOPSIS

In old Jerusalem, the very first church is struggling for survival. Future saints Peter, Paul, James, and Mother Mary hold a pivotal meeting to determine a way forward. Wine is consumed and festering wounds reopened as faith, heresy, and sexual seduction become entangled. Somehow, by the end of the evening, the future of Christianity is decided.

CIRCUMSCHISM

CHARACTERS

- PETER: male, late 40's, also called Simon Peter and referred to as the rock. He is the first disciple of Jesus. Peter is large physically and emotionally.
- MOTHER MARY: female, late 60's, the elderly mother of Jesus. Mother Mary is bent but unbowed.
- PAUL: male, early 40's, also called Saul. He is the writer of multiple New Testament letters and founder of multiple diaspora churches. Paul is physically slight but intense.
- RHODA: female, late teens, maidservant of Mary. Rhoda is physically extremely ripe.
- JAMES: male, late 40's, the brother of Jesus and the head of the early church in Jerusalem. James is the voice of authority
- MARY: female, mid 40's, a wealthy patron of the early church. Mary is supportive and giving.

SCENE 1

(In the year 49 AD, in the city of Jerusalem, in the house of Mary.)

(Lights rise on the main room. In the center is a rectangular table placed at an angle with two downstage chairs. On the table are a washing bowl and cloth.)

(RHODA enters carrying a bowl of fruit and places it on the table, then remains standing, looking into the distance.)

(MARY enters.)

MARY

Rhoda, are the preparations complete?

RHODA

Almost.

(She remains standing, looking distant.)

MARY

Well, should you not finish?

RHODA

I was thinking.

MARY

(Waits.)

And?

RHODA

I was thinking a house this large needs more than two women.

MARY

Goodness girl, our brethren are in and out of here constantly.

RHODA

I was thinking of someone who would stay.

MARY

Your duties are not enough to keep you occupied?

RHODA

Occupied but not fulfilled.

MARY

Then fulfill my wish to be ready for our guests.

(RHODA arranges the fruit in the bowl while MARY adjusts the chairs to her liking.)

RHODA

You said there will only be a few tonight.

MARY

Yes, but an esteemed few.

RHODA

And will brother Peter be among these few?

MARY

Peter, and brother James. Mother Mary if she is able. And apparently this Paul we hear so much about. So be attentive to their needs.

(JAMES enters and knocks on the door. RHODA goes to the door.)

RHODA

Brother James, we welcome you.

JAMES

Rhoda.

MARY

Grace to you brother James.

JAMES

And to you Mary.

(JAMES and MARY exchange
a holy kiss.)

JAMES

As always, thank you for receiving us.

MARY

Whatever is mine is yours. I pray that all will
go well tonight.

JAMES

Then pray earnestly, both for our small
gathering tonight and for our large gathering
tomorrow.

MARY

I shall offer up special prayers for all your
gatherings. And perhaps some wine might be of
use also. Rhoda?

(RHODA exits.)

MARY

I understand we will be joined by a certain
Paul.

JAMES

No doubt we will.

MARY

Yet there is doubt in your voice.

JAMES

Concern in my voice.

MARY

We hear many things about this Paul.

JAMES

And hopefully tonight we shall discover the truth.

(PETER enters and knocks on the door. MARY goes to the door.)

MARY

Brother Peter! Enter into my house with gladness. You have been away from us for too long.

PETER

Greetings, Mary.

(PETER and MARY exchange a holy kiss.)

JAMES

Simon Peter, the peace of God.

PETER

Peace be multiplied.

(PETER and JAMES exchange a holy kiss. RHODA enters bearing a wineskin and cup.)

RHODA

Brother Peter, grace be unto you.

PETER

And unto you also. Can this be Rhoda?

RHODA

You remember me.

PETER

You have changed greatly since last I was here.

RHODA

Like the fruit of the vine I have ripened.
Would you like a taste?

PETER

I most assuredly would.

(RHODA pours a cup and gives
it to PETER. He takes a
righteous drink while looking
at RHODA.)

PETER

Bless you girl.

JAMES

And so brother, how is your wife these days?

PETER

My wife? I hardly know. I see her so seldom.
The preaching of the gospel has taken over my
days.

JAMES

And your preaching, how does that go?

PETER

Need you ask? If I enter the synagogue I am
attacked verbally, and if I dare to enter the
temple I am attacked physically. I have become
an outcast among my own people.

JAMES

We are your people.

PETER

And have all of WE become outcasts?

JAMES

We are still Jews. We must be like the prophets of old and count ourselves blessed when our faith is tested.

PETER

Then I am blessed beyond measure.

(MOTHER MARY enters and knocks on the door with her cane. RHODA goes to the door.)

RHODA

Mother Mary, let me help you.

MOTHER MARY

Bless you child.

MARY

Mother Mary, we are thankful you could come.

MOTHER MARY

And I am thankful to be able.

(MOTHER MARY and MARY exchange a holy kiss.)

MOTHER MARY

And who might this be? His countenance appears familiar.

JAMES

Mother Mary.

MOTHER MARY

Ah yes, James, my second born. I remember you now.

(MOTHER MARY and JAMES exchange a brief embrace.)

JAMES

I admit I have neglected my visits of late.

MOTHER MARY

You have become like a stranger. My house may not be as fine as this, but surely there is room enough to sit with me and partake of a meal.

JAMES

The work of the Lord has kept me busy.

MOTHER MARY

Even the Lord needed a day of rest. And Simon Peter, have you become larger or am I just withering away?

PETER

Greetings Mother Mary.

(PETER bends down to attempt a holy kiss but MOTHER MARY waves him away with her hand.)

MOTHER MARY

O please, enough with all this kissing.

PETER

The holy kiss conveys our bond as brothers and sisters.

MOTHER MARY

The holy kiss conveys our fevers and miasmas. We may all share the same heart and the same soul, but we need not share the same fetid breath. And what are we to pray for tonight? Shall it be for deliverance from the tyranny of the Romans, or from the treachery of our so called Jewish brethren? Or possibly for reprieve from drought and famine and pestilence. Tell me, what is to be our misery of choice for tonight?

JAMES

Tonight we pray for wisdom concerning the gentiles.

MOTHER MARY

Gentiles you say! You need no wisdom to deal with those troublesome pagans. You need only to stay away from them.

JAMES

Easier spoken than accomplished. It seems that a number of them are seeking to enter our fellowship.

MOTHER MARY

Gentiles joining God's church! Heathen becoming disciples of Christ! What perversion of nature has brought this about?

PETER

A perversion named Paul.

MOTHER MARY

Saul who now calls himself Paul. Saul the persecutor, Paul the fanatic. He needs two names and more to account for all his deeds and misdeeds.