

# TWELVE SEATS AT THE TABLE

**By Susan Furlong  
and Marilee Lake**

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### DEDICATION

This play is dedicated to the fourteen men who performed in the first presentation of *The Twelve Seats at the Table* on Maundy Thursday in 1996. We asked a great deal of these men who had to put their faith in someone else's vision. Most had never performed before an audience and none had ever worn makeup, yet each man eagerly became his disciple on stage. Our church now knows Jesus' followers in a personal way because of these brave souls. We thank God's guiding spirit for bringing them to us and for giving our words life.

The Playwrights

### STORY OF PLAY

The setting, inspired by da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper," is the upper room during the last Passover meal celebrated by Jesus and His disciples before the crucifixion. Each disciple, speaking in monologue form, tells why he chose to follow Jesus and how his life has been changed by His presence. Like all men of faith, past and present, each has a different vision of the Lord's purpose, yet, despite their doubts and fears, they are united in their devotion to the Messiah. The audience experiences the humanness of each apostle in this powerful presentation that asks, "Is one of the seats at the table for you?" Minimal set and limited rehearsals needed.

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS (14 M)**

NARRATOR --opens and closes the drama.  
JESUS -- our Savior.  
THADDEUS -- wanted Jesus to show the world His power.  
ANDREW -- the first disciple chosen. Not a scholar, so needed to understand through parables. .  
SIMON THE ZEALOT -- a fighting man who first thought Jesus was a new leader for his cause.  
PHILIP -- driven by a cynical need for facts.  
NATHANIEL -- an educated man, but first thought Jesus was an ordinary traveling preacher.  
SIMON PETER --brother of Andrew, a fisherman who speaks his own mind, loudly and often.  
JAMES -- Brother of John. Both are quick to anger, slow to forgive, and find many of Jesus' teachings have been hard to accept.  
THOMAS -- always thinks the situation is worse than it really is.  
MATTHEW -- a tax collector whose family cut him off but who continued to live his life exactly as he wanted until Jesus came.  
JAMES THE YOUNGER -- finds out he, not Matthew, is the one who needs to be forgiven.  
JOHN -- brother of James, strong-willed, quick-tempered, but wonders if he really is ready to serve.  
JUDAS -- treasurer who wonders if he was chosen not in spite of his faults, but because of them.

*The goal of this play is to meet the disciples as real people -- 12 men with different backgrounds and different reasons for following Jesus, each with his own doubts, questions, and agendas for Jesus and His mission. The time frame is the night of the Passover so no historical aftermath is included.*

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**PRODUCTION NOTES**

Costumes and scenery should conform with the da Vinci painting, "The Last Supper." Wigs and beards can be purchased for those men who are unable to grow a beard or whose hair style is unsuitable.

Props for the table include 13 goblets and small plates, serving trays, a larger communion goblet for Jesus, and wine pitchers. Grapes, pita bread, and grape juice can be set also. The disciples can eat and drink, but must be careful not to have a mouthful of food before their monologue.

A blue light over the entire scene will give it the look of the setting sun. Another spotlight should highlight each speaker during his monologue. Flying microphones can be hung over the table. Additional mikes can be set under the tablecloth.

Taped music can serve as a prelude, during the taking of offering, and during communion.

Communion can be served at the foot of the stage as the actors hold positions similar to the painting.

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**SCENE 1**

*(AT RISE: DISCIPLES come on stage singly or groups of two or three as if they were arriving at the supper from various parts of town. They gather at the table close to the positions in the painting and greet each other with silent movements and mime, called "chatter." NARRATOR begins speaking when all are on stage.)*

NARRATOR: You will soon see before you a representation of Leonardo da Vinci's painting of "The Last Supper," just as it was painted on the wall of the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan in 1495. At that time, da Vinci was experimenting with a new fresco technique, but it turned out to be a failure, and today the portrait is hardly more than an impressive ruin. The one thing that does remain complete and whole as it was 500 years ago is what the painting represents, one of the last times Jesus spent with His disciples before His crucifixion. *(Pause as JESUS mimes this to the DISCIPLES, actually breaking the bread and holding up the cup.)*

When Jesus broke bread with His disciples, He said, "Know this to be true, my friends. The bread that God gives is the one who has come down from heaven and gives life to the world. Take and share this bread with all of your brothers and sisters. Take and eat for this is my body which is given for you: do this in remembrance of me. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you. Drink all of it."

*(LIGHTS go off table scene.)*

If you can, imagine yourself at the table with Christ that night. What would you say and do? What advice would you offer to your Master who says this is the last time you'll be together? How would you explain what you've seen over the past three years? Jesus says your faith will be tested. Are you strong enough to withstand what is to come? *(Pause)*

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Try to imagine what each of these apostles must have been going through. Some of them came to the Passover meal hoping that Jesus would finally declare himself to be the Messiah and that this announcement would mean the end of foreign rule. Others still struggled with their own understanding of Jesus' words and His miracles. But instead of resolving their fears and doubts, Jesus spoke in mysteries. He left them with many unanswered questions, many unfulfilled expectations, and one frightening accusation of betrayal.

*(SPOTLIGHT comes up on JESUS.)*

JESUS: Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.

*(BLACKOUT. NARRATOR exits and DISCIPLES freeze in position of painting. LIGHTS up. Action is frozen for about 30 seconds so the audience can absorb the scene. Then movement begins, and after few seconds more THADDEUS begins speaking. When he says his first word the others freeze wherever they are. Similar five seconds of movement follow between each monologue.)*

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