

# Of Sheep and Samaritans

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## Director's Statement

*It can be tempting, in a statement such as this, to stray too far into hyperbole and pretension, so I will endeavour to keep these comments brief and strictly factual.*

*I remember clearly my first encounter with *Of Sheep and Samaritans* while studying theatrical direction under the tutelage of Lee Strasberg in New York. It was as if hitherto unknown vistas of the landscape of dramatic possibility had opened up before me and I began to weep as I read, finding myself unable to stop – either reading or crying – for several weeks afterward.*

*The importance of such a work (to which Shakespeare, Chekhov and Beckett can only pretend) cannot be overstated. The production you are privileged to witness today, however, is especially exciting, featuring as it does a new film by Jesus in place of the metadramatic poem which is the heart of the piece. This poem, which would normally be performed in a single breath by the actor playing Jesus under a pure white spotlight on an otherwise dark and empty stage, is here transformed into a vibrant work of pure cinema, likely to put one in mind of the classics of *La Nouvelle Vague*, especially Godard's *À Bout De Souffle* and Truffaut's *Antoine Doinel* series.*

*It is impossible to predict how any individual audience member will respond to *Of Sheep and Samaritans*, but one thing is certain: by curtain's fall you will not be the same person you were at its rise. You will likely be in a daze – a sort of trance brought about by the sheer weight of its genius. If this is the case, my advice to you is to go home, run yourself a cold bath and drink a tall glass of undiluted pickle juice. It was only by employing such methods that I was able to stop crying, all those years ago in New York, and it is a strategy I still return to often. I wish you well, in your journey of self-rediscovery.*

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*A Young Church Session is beginning. On screen, a window looks out over the church carpark. Teacher, Jesus, Kid 1, Kid 2, and Kid 3 all enter from the church cupboard.*

Teacher: All right everyone. Come in. Settle down.

Kid 1: What are we doing today?

Teacher: Sit down and I'll tell you.

Kid 2: Tell us what?

Kid 1: What we're doing today.

Kid 3: What *are* we doing today?

Kid 1: That's what I wanted to know.

Teacher: Sit down and I'll tell you.

Kid 1: Who's that?

Teacher: Just sit down will you and I'll tell you.  
Kid 2: It's like there's something we're supposed to do. But what?  
Kid 3: Maybe if we sit down, we'll find out.  
Kid 2: Good idea.

*All sit down.*

Teacher: Now, as some of you have noticed we have a very special guest with us here today.  
Kid 1: Who is it.  
Teacher: That's what I'm telling you now.  
Kid 1: (TO JESUS) Is it you.

*JESUS nods and puts fingers on their lips.*

Teacher: Now, as you know, we've been talking a lot about the stories Jesus told. So this week we have a very special guest. Can anybody tell me who they think it is?  
Kid 1: It's that guy.  
Teacher: Yes. But who is that guy?  
Kid 1: Is it the Prodigal Son?  
Teacher: No.  
Kid 2: Is it me?  
Teacher: How could it be you?  
Kid 2: I dunno.  
Kid 3: Is it the Bishop of Ely?  
Teacher: Almost. It's Jesus!

*General reactions – Wow! Hooray! Gasp! Etc...*

Jesus: Hello everyone. I'm here to tell you a story.  
Kid 1: Is it the Prodigal Son?  
Jesus: Not today, I'm afraid.  
Kid 2: How about...  
Lost woman: (COMING OUT OF CUPBOARD) Excuse me. Is my sheep in here?  
Teacher: Not in here, I'm afraid.  
Lost woman: OK. Sorry to interrupt.

*On the other side of the stage, a SHEEP peeps out from behind a table.*

Sheep: Baaa!

*The SHEEP hides behind the table again.*

Teacher: Now. Where were we?

Kid 3: Is the story the one about the Mustard Seed?

Jesus: No.

Kid 3: Oh. That's a shame.

Kid 1: Why is it a shame?

Kid 3: Because I brought one with me. I thought we could see if it would really grow into a massive tree.

Kid 2: Let's see.

Kid 3: Here, look.

Kid 2: I don't see anything.

Jesus: Ah, that's the point, you see? The mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds.

Kid 1: Err. Yes. I think we know that Jesus.

Kid 3: Yeah. We just wanted to see if it would grow into a massive tree.

Teacher: It's a good thought Anna but I think it's becoming a bit of a distraction. Go and throw it out the window.

*KID 3 throws it over her shoulder. On the screen, the window breaks.*

Teacher: Right then, Jesus. I think you had better just tell us your story before we have any other interruptions.

Lost woman: (COMING OUT OF CUPBOARD) Excuse me. Has anybody seen my sheep?

Teacher: You've already checked in here.

Lost woman: Did I? Sorry. Just making sure I search everywhere. I do love that sheep.

Teacher: That's fine but it's not in here.

*On the other side of the stage, a SHEEP peeps out from behind a table.*

Sheep: Baaa!

*The SHEEP hides behind the table again.*

Kid 1: The funny thing is she has another 99 sheep at home. I wonder who's looking after the others...

Kid 2: Is it me?

Kid 3: It's probably the Bishop of Ely.

Teacher: Can we have a bit more good listening, please. Sorry, Jesus.

Jesus: No worries. I'm in a pretty forgiving mood today.

Teacher: That's good.

Jesus: And every day, to be honest. Now, where was I? Oh yes – it all began a long time ago...

*On screen, a video plays of The Parable of the Good Samaritan. All characters watch the screen until it's over.*

Jesus: There once was a man on the Jericho road,  
If he thought there was danger, I can't say it showed.  
But along came some robbers, who bashed in his head,  
Then stole all his money and left him for dead.

Along came a vicar, his head bowed in prayer,  
But when he had seen the poor chap lying there,  
He quickly crossed over the road to pass by,  
Perhaps he had some kind of plank in his eye?

A woman appeared saying, "I've lost my sheep."  
But it wasn't around so she started to weep.  
To be honest, her showing up now is a stretch –  
She's nothing to do with this part of the sketch.

Along came a lawyer, who knew what was right,  
He'd studied the Bible by day and by night.  
When he saw the fellow, he crossed the road too!  
How did he decide that was what he should do?

A passing Samaritan saw this sad scene,  
But she didn't follow this rotten routine:  
She went to the man (she could not have gone faster),  
To clean up his wounds and apply a big plaster.

Then gently she lifted the man on her horse,  
(It could have been some kind of donkey, of course)  
She pre-paid the bill at a local hotel,  
So the man was looked after until he was well.

So now here's the question I'm putting to you:  
Which one did the thing God would want you to do?  
Yes, this is the point that I want to belabour:  
Which one of these people was truly a neighbour?

*When the video is finished, everyone pay attention to the teacher again. On screen, the image reverts to the window, but now there is a giant tree outside.*

Teacher: That was brilliant. How did you manage to do all those different voices, Jesus?

Jesus: Just lots of practice. No! Actually – miracle. Let's call that one a miracle.

Teacher: Well it was very impressive. What did you all think?

Kid 2: I think ending on a feminine rhyme creates an unnecessary tension in the concluding couplet.

Teacher: Not about the poem. About the question!

Kid 2: Oh. I don't know. I wasn't listening.

Jesus: The question was 'Who was the man's neighbour?'

Kid 1: The first one?

Jesus: The vicar? No – he didn't help him.

Kid 3: Oh. The second one then.

Teacher: Were none of you listening? The second one was the lawyer. He didn't help him either.

Kid 2: I guess it must have been the woman looking for her sheep.

*On the other side of the stage, a SHEEP peeps out from behind a table.*

Sheep: Baaa!

Lost Woman: (BURSTING OUT OF THE CUPBOARD) Sheepy! I've been looking all over for you!

Sheep: Baaa!

*She crosses the stage to take the SHEEP. As the rest of the sketch plays out, she strokes it, etc.*

Kid 2: Excuse me?

Lost Woman: Yes?

Kid 2: Do you know who was the man's neighbour?

Lost Woman: The Samaritan, I expect.

Kid 1: The Samaritan! That doesn't sound very likely. Are we sure it wasn't the vicar?

Jesus: No, she's right. It was the Samaritan. Because he was the one who helped.

Kid 2: It seems like all this must mean something.

Teacher: What do you think it means?

Kid 3: Maybe it means we should be on the lookout for robbers?

Kid 1: I think it probably means we should help people.

Kid 2: But who should we help?

Kid 1: Our neighbour. Obviously.

Kid 3: But who *is* our neighbour.

Kid 1: I don't know.

Teacher: Well, I suppose it's anyone we help. Right, Jesus?

Jesus: Yes. Anyone you help is your neighbour. And you should try to help everyone.

Kid 1: But that's so many people.

Kid 2: Like, 100!

Kid 3: That's as many as the sheep!

Teacher: Well, maybe you don't have to help everyone all at once. But if you help one person at a time then soon you'll get to 100.

Jesus: And, of course, if you help one person. And then both you and the person you helped go on to help one person each, then soon the world is full of helpers!

Kid 2: It's almost like the way a mustard seed starts small and gets massive.

Jesus: Good point.

Lost Woman: Speaking of which, did anyone throw a mustard seed out the window? It's just it's grown into quite a big tree and now it's blocking the car park!

Kid 3: Let's see....

Teacher: Oh no! I'm going to be in such trouble with the church wardens. Again!

*All exit into church cupboard to look at the tree.*