

SAMUEL TALKS WITH JONATHAN

Scene 5 from the *Faith in Grey Places*
'Living with conflict' theatre series

by Christine Woolgar

ADVISORY WARNING: Some mentions of warfare and sexual infidelity (incest and adultery).

PREMISE: The prophet Samuel, now deceased, converses with a series of guests in paradise, reflecting on their past experiences and what it was to live with conflict.

In this, the fifth scene, he meets Jonathan amongst a colonnade of marble pillars. Jonathan shares how Michelangelo's David prompted him explore stories from other traditions and see echoes of his life in them.

LENGTH: ~1,600 words

GENRE: Drama. Duologue.

CHARACTERS:

SAMUEL: The Old Testament prophet, now deceased. Mature, measured, kind.

JONATHAN: The son of King Saul and best friend of David, now deceased. Thoughtful, imaginative, humble.

This sketch was first written in May 2022 as part of a lent series (that I didn't finish until after Easter). I welcome development feedback, particularly from those with an interest in Christian theatre. Please reach out via the blog here: <https://faith.workthegreymatter.com/about/>

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SCENE 5

A COLONNADE OF LARGE WHITE MARBLE COLUMNS STRETCHING IN ALL DIRECTIONS AS FAR AS THE EYE CAN SEE.

JONATHAN STANDS AMIDST THE PILLARS LOOK UP AND AROUND.

ENTER SAMUEL WHO LOOKS OVERWHELMED BY THE PLACE.

JONATHAN: Samuel!

SAMUEL: Jonathan.

THEY HUG.

JONATHAN: You wanted to meet with me.

SAMUEL: You wanted to show me something.

JONATHAN: (GESTURES TO THEIR SURROUNDINGS) And here we are.

SAMUEL: What is this place?

JONATHAN: I call it the Marble Arboretum.

SAMUEL: Because all the columns are like trees?

JONATHAN: Yes, and the marble for each one comes from different places around the world.

SAMUEL: So they're all different?

JONATHAN: Yes.

SAMUEL: How far does it go?

JONATHAN: How large is a great forest? (BEAT) They're arranged by colour. Here you have white; if you head right you'll find the greens, to the left the browns. And if you go straight you'll reach the black marble.

SAMUEL: It's incredible.

JONATHAN: I like to come here when I'm deciding my next project.

SAMUEL: Jonathan, your sculpture of my mother and me... it was amazing.

JONATHAN: I'm glad you liked it.

SAMUEL: I felt so seen. It was so comforting.

JONATHAN: Good.

SAMUEL: Why did you carve them?

JONATHAN: You were one of my heroes! You were judge of Israel and yet you were willing to anoint my father Saul as king. You weren't after power. You were grieved that the people rejected God as their king, but you didn't take that as a personal failure. You just... followed the LORD. Wherever his voice called.

SAMUEL: So what got you into sculpting marble?

JONATHAN: Have you seen Michelangelo's massive statue of David?

SAMUEL: Can't say that I have.

JONATHAN: Well, have a look sometime. There's your answer.

SAMUEL: Have you done any sculptures of David?

JONATHAN: (LAUGHS A LITTLE) No. He's had enough fan art. (PAUSE) I guess marble as a medium appealed to me because it's hard. You can't melt it in a furnace. Instead you have to chip and chisel away. But if you keep at it, you can mould it, shape it into something beautiful. And once it has that shape, it doesn't change. Its hardness becomes one of the things that helps *hold* its beauty.

SAMUEL: What if you make a mistake?

JONATHAN: Well, if you have a good reference image for how you want it to look, and if you plan what you're doing, you should be able to prevent that.

SAMUEL: But if you do make a mistake, there's no way to remedy that.

JONATHAN: There is. You just have to make it into something else. That was the story behind Michelangelo's David. The marble block was very tall, but quite narrow, making it difficult to work with. And the marble wasn't good quality either. Several sculptors worked on it and gave up before Michelangelo got the commission.

SAMUEL: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.'

JONATHAN: Oh don't get me started! If you want to read deep meaning and significance into it, there's plenty to go on. How his whole posture is pre-battle, not post-battle. How his right hand is too large. His eyes don't look at the same point; he has a slight squint. Then you have the politics of where it was positioned and how it came to symbolise the city of Florence.

SAMUEL: But what appealed to you about it? You wouldn't have noticed all those details the first time you saw it.

JONATHAN: I saw it as imaginative storytelling. David wasn't naked when he fought Goliath. But Michelangelo showed the story differently. Deliberately.

SAMUEL: You don't think it was because he lacked a good reference image for how shepherd boys in ancient Israel dressed?

JONATHAN: (LAUGHS) No. Though, Michelangelo did forget that David was circumcised.

SAMUEL: Oh really?

JONATHAN: Yeah. It made me curious to reimagine moments of my life.

SAMUEL: But isn't that a kind of escapism? Do we not have to find peace by accepting and owning our past? Even the parts we wish had happened differently?

JONATHAN: Did it feel like escapism when you saw the statues I carved of you and your mother? You mother didn't see you fall over; but her statue sees.

SAMUEL: (PAUSE) I suppose I don't like making our heroes into idols, moulding them into who we wish they had been; or who we wish we were. It's that that makes me uncomfortable.

JONATHAN: Oh, for sure. And people did that with David and with this statue of David, I won't pretend otherwise. But for me personally, seeing it gave me the licence to imagine. To contemplate different stories and images – including ones from outside our traditions.

SAMUEL: Such as?

JONATHAN: The legend of King Arthur for example. He was hailed as a good king who had a round table, meaning every voice at the table was equal. And he had this mentor, called Merlin.

SAMUEL: Merlin?

JONATHAN: He was a wizard.

SAMUEL: As in, a warlock?

JONATHAN: Yes. He reminded me of you. (BEAT) I mean that as a compliment. Merlin taught Arthur right from wrong and was very wise, and eventually a very elderly man.

SAMUEL: So what does Arthur do?

JONATHAN: He comes from humble beginnings, establishes peace, goes on a quest for the holy grail. He's referred to as the 'once and future king'.

SAMUEL: Sounds messianic.

JONATHAN: It is a bit. Then he commits incest with his half sister and his kingdom is usurped by his son Mordred.

SAMUEL: Oh. That sounds like, um...

JONATHAN: Like David and his sons, I know.

SAMUEL: Do you see yourself in this story?

JONATHAN: Sometimes I think of myself as like one of Arthur's knights, Lancelot. He was the king's closest and most loyal friend, and yet not loyal enough. And thoroughly absent at the time of the king's need.

SAMUEL: What do you mean by that?

JONATHAN: Well, I wasn't there when David was king. I couldn't fight for him, advise him, or deter him from some of the decisions he made.

SAMUEL: (GENTLY) Jonathan, you were dead.

JONATHAN: Because I chose to fight by my father's side, even though he persecuted David without cause. I could have made a different choice.

SAMUEL: No, you couldn't have. You were the king's eldest son. You couldn't suddenly not turn up in battle to fight. It would have been treason, and a betrayal of all your soldiers.

You weren't disloyal to David. You didn't betray him. Rather, your father, King Saul, put you in an impossible situation. You're not Lancelot, you're more like (SLIGHTLY SURPRISED HE'S SAYING THIS NAME) Faramir!

JONATHAN: Huh.

SAMUEL: (SLIGHTLY SHY) Who is Faramir?

JONATHAN: You don't know?

SAMUEL: No, the Spirit just told me to say the name Faramir.

JONATHAN: He's a character in a novel called *The Lord of the Rings*. His father is steward of the land of Gondor, at least until such time as the true king returns. Faramir's father is a very strong-willed man, who does not want to cede power, who does not delight in his son Faramir, and who dies in disgrace.

LONG PAUSE.

SAMUEL: And does Faramir die with his father?

JONATHAN: No, he lives and serves the king.

SAMUEL: And... is the king a good king?

JONATHAN: (SMILES) Well, he's a lot like Jesus, if that counts?

SAMUEL LAUGHS. PAUSE.

You're going to tell me that my father betrayed me in his lack of faith and that, in a sense, David betrayed me when he committed adultery.

SAMUEL: Yes. And the fact that you had so little choice says far less about you and any guilt you bear, than it does about them and the power they had. (BEAT) Sometimes Jonathan, I think neither Saul nor David deserved you. But then, life isn't about getting what we deserve, is it?

JONATHAN: No.

SAMUEL: (GENTLY) And just because you can see their faults for what they were, that doesn't mean you don't love them.

JONATHAN: I know.

LONG PAUSE.

SAMUEL: So what do you think you might sculpt next?

JONATHAN: I had thought maybe something to do with the Holy Grail and the last supper, but that idea doesn't quite sit right.

SAMUEL: Because so many people have done it before?

JONATHAN: Partly. But it's also about what you were saying earlier; I don't want to create a fiction. The idea of the Holy Grail has become so famous that one can easily forget the person who gave that cup its significance. I don't want to do that.

I don't want to sculpt something about the idea of healing and life. I want to show something of God.

PAUSE.

SAMUEL: How about, instead of sculpting the last supper, why don't you do something on the first supper.

JONATHAN: Like, after the resurrection?

SAMUEL: No, I mean, after Jesus sits in his kingdom. He hasn't drunk from the vine since that night. You could do something where he takes the cup again and drinks for the first time.

JONATHAN: (SMILES) I like that.

SAMUEL: If you wanted, he could be sitting at a round table, looking out towards the great host of heaven and all his adoptive brothers and sisters.

JONATHAN: Sitting or reclining?

SAMUEL: Up to you.

JONATHAN: I think sitting. (BEAT) What do you think the table etiquette will be? Will he have cutlery or chopsticks? Or both? And how many courses?

SAMUEL: I don't know.

JONATHAN: I don't have any reference images.

SAMUEL: That's what the imagination is for, isn't it? (BEAT) I think the hard part will be capturing the joy and delight in Jesus' face.

JONATHAN: (CHUCKLES) No, that'll be easy.