

JERUSALEM SPEAKS

by Rochelle Pennington



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PRODUCTION NOTES

Jerusalem Speaks includes twelve character portrayals of those persons who played significant roles in the final days of Christ's earthly walk.

The roles are intended to be used during the Lenten weeks — either included during the Sunday worship services or during midweek Lenten services (perhaps in place of the sermon). Each week includes two Bible readers and two character portrayals. (One person may handle both Bible readings in order to reduce the number of individuals needed weekly to three.)

The performance time is minimal, ranging from twelve to nineteen minutes for each service. Rehearsal is also minimal, since the characters do not interact with one another.

The Bible readings may be delivered from the pulpit. Character narrations may also be delivered from the pulpit or from the center altar area.

There are no props required.

The costumes should be the traditional biblical robes, headpieces, and sandals — the “standards” used from year to year in most congregations.

WEEKLY SYNOPSIS

Week #1 — Three or four individual readers for a total performance time of twelve minutes:

Scripture Reader/Servant Girl
Scripture Reader/Peter the Disciple

The servant girl's narration of Peter's denial complements Peter's own testimony of turning his back on Christ the night before his crucifixion.

Week #2 — Three or four individual readers for a total performance time of thirteen minutes:

Scripture Reader/Caiaphas the High Priest
Scripture Reader/Judas the Betrayer

Caiaphas the High Priest confesses his intentions to eliminate Jesus while Judas' narration gives details of his betrayal orchestrated through the religious leaders.

Week #3 — Three or four individual readers for a total performance time of fourteen minutes:

Scripture Reader/Herod
Scripture Reader/Mary Magdalene

Herod Antipas' narration details the five individual Herods who are spoken of in Scripture and how each affected Jesus Christ. Mary Magdalene shares her account of walking beside Jesus Christ during his earthly life as well as being present to witness his death and resurrection.

Week #4 — Three or four individual readers for a total performance time of seventeen minutes:

Scripture Reader/Pontius Pilate
Scripture Reader/Barabbas

Pontius Pilate shares the anguish of his political manipulation in sentencing Jesus Christ to death. Barabbas' narration includes details of his release and his confusion over watching Jesus die in his stead.

Week #5 — Three or four individual readers for a total performance time of nineteen minutes:

Scripture Reader/Roman Soldier
Scripture Reader/Malchus, the High Priest's Servant

A Roman soldier, present at the Crucifixion, shares his acknowledgment of Jesus as the Son of God following the events of Good Friday. Malchus, who had his ear cut off by Peter the night of Jesus' arrest in the Garden, ponders the happenings in Gethsemane.

Week #6 — Three or four individual readers for a total performance time of nineteen minutes:

Scripture Reader/John the Disciple

Scripture Reader/Mary, Mother of Jesus

John recalls the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures, as well as the words of Jesus preparing his disciples for the coming crucifixion and resurrection, and pieces together the meaning of it all. Mary's heartache and hope are intertwined in the story she shares of her Son — from his birth to his death to his eternal life.

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1 *First Sunday of Lent (Servant Girl)*

2

3

(*SCRIPTURE READER steps up to the pulpit.*)

4

SCRIPTURE READER: A reading from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 26, verses 33 through 35 and 69 through 75.

6

Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” “I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same.

12

Now Peter was sitting out in the courtyard, and a servant girl came to him. “You also were with Jesus of Galilee,” she said. But he denied it before them all. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said. Then he went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, “This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.” He denied it again, with an oath: “I don’t know the man!” After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, “Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.” Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, “I don’t know the man!” Immediately a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the words Jesus had spoken: “Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” And he went outside and wept bitterly.

27

(*SCRIPTURE READER exits. SERVANT GIRL enters and speaks at the pulpit.*)

29

SERVANT GIRL: Jerusalem had been turned upside-down. All in four days. And all because of the One they called Jesus. First there was the chaos of jubilation when he rode into the city gates four days ago, riding on a donkey — imagine that! Everyone was shouting for joy at his arrival, a hero’s welcome, and now, tonight, he got arrested and hauled off by guards to a trial held in

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1 the darkness of night.

2 The city has gone mad, I tell you. How bizarre it is to
3 see palm branches lying in the streets, the same palm
4 branches the crowds waved in celebration only four
5 days ago. And now they are crushed beneath the feet of
6 crowds running to condemn him. Do you hear it? It is
7 the drumbeat of hysteria pounding, pounding. And it is
8 the sound of footsteps running to hide, pounding,
9 pounding, to flee from admitting any knowledge of this
10 Jesus, lest they be condemned as well. Where are his
11 supporters? Where have the multitudes gone? Those
12 who wildly shouted, “Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he
13 who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Mark 11:9).

14 I spotted one man I was *sure* I saw with Jesus all
15 week, but he denied it. Not only denied it to me, but
16 denied it flatly *three* times; said he didn’t know him, no
17 way, no how. But the funny thing is, I later learned that
18 he *did* know him and was even one of his closest friends.
19 His name was Peter. How do I know? Because I became
20 a follower of this Jesus after his resurrection, brought to
21 faith through hearing the remarkable testimonies of
22 those who knew him and loved him, Peter among them.

23 Had Peter failed his Lord? Perhaps in those moments
24 when flesh met fear, but not in the overall picture of his
25 spirit and his faith. You see, Peter would later lay down
26 his life in the name of Jesus as he accepted the same
27 death as Christ: crucifixion. The only difference? Peter
28 told those condemning him to death that he wasn’t
29 worthy to be hung right side up like his Lord, so they
30 should crucify him upside-down. And so they did.
31 (*SERVANT GIRL exits.*)

32

33 *First Sunday of Lent (Peter)*

34

35 (*SCRIPTURE READER stands at the pulpit.*)

1 **SCRIPTURE READER:** A reading from the Gospel of
 2 Matthew, chapter 16, verses 13 through 18 and 21
 3 through 23.

4 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi,
 5 he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of
 6 Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist;
 7 others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the
 8 prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you
 9 say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ,
 10 the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are
 11 you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to
 12 you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you
 13 that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my
 14 church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

15 From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his
 16 disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many
 17 things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and
 18 teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on
 19 the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and
 20 began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall
 21 never happen to you!” Jesus turned and said to Peter,
 22 “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me;
 23 you do not have in mind the things of God, but the
 24 things of men.” (*SCRIPTURE READER exits. PETER enters*
 25 *and speaks from the pulpit.*)

26 **PETER:** It was beside the Sea of Galilee that he found us —
 27 Jesus, that is. My brother Andrew and I were fishing,
 28 simply fishing, when we saw him and then heard him
 29 say, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of
 30 men” (Mark 1:17). We were the first, Andrew and I, to
 31 walk beside him, the first of many who would be drawn
 32 to his miracles and his message — a message of love,
 33 forgiveness, and of an eternal kingdom of God.

34 He healed the sick and raised the dead. He walked on
 35 water and challenged the wisest of the wise among the

1 religious leaders with the wisdom of heaven. He spoke
2 of forgiveness and of mercy. And he spoke of grace. No
3 wonder the multitudes were following him! Who is not
4 in need of these? You just heard the servant girl speak
5 of my *own* denial of the King of Kings the night of his
6 betrayal. But Jesus' heart was a heart full of mercy for
7 the failing sinner. And this included me.

8 Can you imagine that I had witnessed the dead come
9 to life before my very eyes and had walked on water
10 with the Lord Jesus Christ himself, *and then denied*
11 *him*? I had watched the lame get up and walk after
12 being touched by him and had beheld the blind seeing,
13 but when asked if I knew him, I denied it all.

14 But in my weakness, every weakness known to
15 Jesus — who, as God, knew the future until all eternity,
16 he said he would use *me* to build his church. Is this not
17 an awesome God — a God who trusts the work of his
18 kingdom to those he knows can — and do — fail? But
19 this was nothing new. The Scriptures make known the
20 flaws of the mighty men of God. Moses murdered, as did
21 King David — who also committed adultery. Abraham
22 lied, Noah got intoxicated, Samson was a womanizer.
23 And so the list goes on. And on and on.

24 Even when Jesus announced the news that he would
25 build his church on me, “The Rock,” he turned around
26 moments later and addressed me as Satan, saying I was
27 a stumbling block to him. The messages were, indeed,
28 confusing at times. But there was one thing I was never
29 confused about. I was loved by him, deeply and
30 completely. And eternally. And that's why I followed
31 from the start, when he invited me to come along with
32 him at the shore of the sea.

33 “Come, follow me,” he said. Do you hear him? You're
34 invited, too. (*PETER exits.*)

35

1 *Second Sunday of Lent (Caiaphas)*

2

3

(SCRIPTURE READER steps up to the pulpit.)

4

SCRIPTURE READER: The following Scriptures are taken
5 from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.
6 The chief priests and the teachers of the law ... began
7 looking for a way to kill Jesus, for they feared him,
8 because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

9

The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for
10 a way to arrest Jesus immediately ... but they were
11 afraid of the people. Keeping a close watch on him, they
12 sent spies, who pretended to be honest. They hoped to
13 catch Jesus in something he said so that they might hand
14 him over to the power and authority of the governor.

15

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap
16 Jesus in his words.

17

Meanwhile, a large crowd of Jews found out that
18 Jesus was there and came, not only because of him but
19 also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.
20 So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well,
21 for on account of him, many of the Jews were going over
22 to Jesus and putting their faith in him. (Do not read — this
23 is for reference only: Mark 11:18, Luke 20:19-20, Matthew
24 22:15, and John 12:9-11.) *(SCRIPTURE READER exits.)*

25

CAIAPHAS enters and speaks from the pulpit.)

26

CAIAPHAS: I am Caiaphas, the high priest. I, alone, hold the
27 ultimate religious power over the people. But my power
28 is threatened by this Jesus. The people are following
29 after him in throngs — speaking of his miracles, his
30 healings, his seemingly divine wisdom, and his raising
31 the dead to life. We must get the people away from
32 him ... even if it means we must kill him.

33

Jesus has even had the nerve to speak against me and
34 the other priests and Pharisees in power. He uses us in
35 his parable teachings as the bad example. As his

1 tell you the truth, one of you will betray me.” They were
 2 very sad and began to say to him one after the other,
 3 “Surely not I, Lord?” Jesus replied, “The one who has
 4 dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.
 5 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him.
 6 But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It
 7 would be better for him if he had not been born.” Then
 8 Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely not
 9 I, Rabbi?” Jesus answered, “Yes, it is you.”

10 *(The next verses are from later that evening and the*
 11 *following morning:)* Now the betrayer had arranged a
 12 signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest
 13 him.” Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Greetings,
 14 Rabbi!” and kissed him. Jesus replied, “Friend, do what
 15 you came for.” Then the men stepped forward, seized
 16 Jesus and arrested him.

17 Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the
 18 elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to
 19 death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him
 20 over to Pilate, the governor. When Judas, who had
 21 betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was
 22 seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins
 23 to the chief priests and the elders. “I have sinned,” he
 24 said, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.” “What is that
 25 to us?” they replied. “That’s your responsibility.” So
 26 Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then
 27 he went away and hanged himself. (Do not read — this is for
 28 reference only: Luke 22:3-6, Matthew 26:20-25, 48-50; 27:1-5.)
 29 *(SCRIPTURE READER exits. JUDAS enters and speaks from*
 30 *the pulpit.)*

31 **JUDAS:** I am Judas, the disciple of Jesus who betrayed him
 32 for thirty pieces of silver — this was the amount I was
 33 paid by the high priests and the religious leaders who
 34 wanted Jesus dead. Darkness entered my heart —
 35 Satan himself — and led me to betray the Son of God. It

1 happened — everything I did — just like the prophet
2 Zechariah had foretold hundreds of years earlier.
3 Zechariah’s words were recorded there in the sacred
4 Scriptures for all to see — words about me and what I
5 would do. Zechariah prophesied that God’s Son would
6 be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver. And so he was.
7 This was the amount I received — the price of a slave.
8 For this price, it was I who sold God out to be arrested,
9 condemned, and killed.

10 It was also Zechariah who prophesied that the money
11 would be thrown back. And so it was. After I saw Jesus
12 condemned, I was filled with remorse and ran back to
13 those who paid me. I returned the coins, confessing, “I
14 have sinned. I’ve betrayed innocent blood” (Matthew
15 27:4). The priests didn’t care. Jesus would soon be dead,
16 and that’s exactly the way they wanted it. Nothing
17 would stop them now from eliminating Jesus. Not even
18 my confession. My words fell on deaf ears. No one would
19 listen.

20 I threw the money at them, and they used it to buy a
21 field — a plot of land in which to bury foreigners who
22 died while traveling through Jerusalem. The field was
23 bought from a potter, and so it is called The Potter’s
24 Field. It’s still in Jerusalem today. It’s also called The
25 Field of Blood because it was bought with “blood
26 money” — money used to shed the blood of Christ.
27 Zechariah had prophesied the thirty pieces of silver
28 would be thrown down in the house of the Lord and
29 given to the potter. Can you imagine? Everything I had
30 done had been recorded centuries before I even existed.
31 The Psalmist foretold that the Son of God’s betrayal
32 would come from a trusted friend. And so it did. From
33 me. The Scriptures said, “Even my close friend, whom I
34 trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel
35 against me” (Psalm 41:9).

1 I am overcome by what I have done to an innocent
 2 man, but mostly I am overcome by what Jesus said to
 3 me after I kissed him — The kiss of betrayal to mark
 4 him out to the guards. Jesus looked at me and said,
 5 “Friend.” *(Pause)* “Friend” is the word he spoke to me.
 6 The One who knew I had come to betray him called me
 7 “Friend.”

8 I am overcome by what I have done to the innocent
 9 Son of God whose life will soon end at the hands of
 10 others. And mine will now end at my own. *(JUDAS exits.)*

11
 12 *Third Sunday of Lent (Herod)*

13
 14 *(SCRIPTURE READER steps up to the pulpit.)*

15 **SCRIPTURE READER:** A reading from the Gospel of Luke,
 16 chapter 13, verses 31 through 33:

17 At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said
 18 to him, “Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod
 19 wants to kill you.”

20 He replied, “Go tell that fox, ‘I will drive out demons
 21 and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third
 22 day I will reach my goal.’ In any case, I must keep going
 23 today and tomorrow and the next day — for surely no
 24 prophet can die outside Jerusalem!” *(SCRIPTURE*
 25 *READER exits. HEROD enters and speaks from the pulpit.)*

26 **HEROD:** My name is Herod — Herod Antipas. I am one of
 27 the five Herods spoken of in the New Testament
 28 Scriptures. We five were all rulers with politically
 29 motivated appointments by the Roman government —
 30 Caesar’s puppets. We had one other thing in common —
 31 the key element that has carried our family name
 32 through the annals of history: We are all woven into the
 33 story of the one they call Jesus.

34 First there was Herod the Great. Wise men came to his
 35 palace, asking where the ruler who had been born King of

1 the Jews was. They had seen a great star rise in the East
2 and had come to worship this new king. Well, this news
3 sent Herod the Great into a rage, because his throne was
4 threatened. His response? He slaughtered every child two
5 years old and under that had been born in Bethlehem.
6 One child escaped the terror — the very child he had set
7 out to murder: Jesus. Herod the Great is known by
8 historians as “The Monster” and “The Butcher.”

9 Then there’s my brother, Herod Philip. His wife,
10 Herodias, left him to marry me, Herod Antipas, at about
11 the time Jesus was coming into his ministry. John the
12 Baptist had baptized Jesus, and it was John the Baptist
13 who was preaching out against Herodias and I getting
14 married because he said she should still be with my
15 brother. Well, she was livid and wanted John silenced.
16 Forever. I was afraid of John because the people
17 believed him to be a holy man, a prophet. I had him
18 thrown in jail, but Herodias wanted him dead. It was at
19 my birthday party that her daughter danced for me,
20 and I, being very moved by her dancing, told her I
21 would give her anything she wanted for doing this — up
22 to half of my kingdom. Her mother — my wife, my
23 brother’s ex-wife — convinced her to ask for the head of
24 John the Baptist on a platter. And so John the Baptist
25 was slaughtered, too — under my order.

26 It was after this that the reported miracles
27 surrounding Jesus began surfacing. I was terrified. I
28 believed Jesus was actually John the Baptist risen from
29 the dead — John, whom I had murdered.

30 The obsession to control by murdering was now
31 targeted at Jesus. The Pharisees and scribes wanted
32 Jesus dead. They arrested him and brought him before
33 Pilate to be sentenced. Pilate didn’t want to do it. He,
34 too, was afraid of who this Jesus actually was. So Pilate
35 sent Jesus *to me*, to let *me* do the dirty work of

1 condemning him. I *did* question him but, like Pilate, I
 2 was concerned about the political implications that
 3 would be affected by condemning Jesus. The people
 4 were following after him in multitudes. So I sent Jesus
 5 back to Pilate.

6 Jesus' life would end at the final word of Pilate, who
 7 set in motion his execution on a cross at Calvary. Soon
 8 Jesus would be dead, and soon we would be done with
 9 him — or so we thought. How wrong we were.

10 Herod the Great didn't succeed in ending Jesus' life
 11 at the cradle, and Jesus' life would not end on that cross
 12 either — the life of his physical body, yes, but the life of
 13 his Spirit eternal, no. You cannot kill what does not die.
 14 God almighty would raise the blood-stained body of his
 15 Son, marred with nail holes, and through this
 16 resurrected body of Jesus Christ, it would be life — not
 17 death — that would have the final word. Just ask the
 18 Herods that came after me — Herod Agrippa the First
 19 and Herod Agrippa the Second. Each of them would
 20 personally deal with what came next: a following of
 21 Jesus in the thousands. And thousands. And thousands.
 22 And thousands. Those disciples kept coming — James,
 23 John, Paul, Stephen. There was no end to them. And in
 24 each, we all would see that the cross we believed would
 25 be the end of Jesus was only the beginning. For Jesus
 26 was alive, and came alive, inside every believer who
 27 confessed his name from that moment on.

28 We thought we could kill him. How wrong we were.
 29 (*HEROD exits.*)

30

31 *Third Sunday of Lent (Mary Magdalene)*

32

33 (*SCRIPTURE READER stands at the pulpit.*)

34 **SCRIPTURE READER:** A reading from the Gospel of Luke,
 35 Chapter 8, verses 1 through 3:

1 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and
2 village to another, proclaiming the good news of the
3 kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also
4 some women who had been cured of evil spirits and
5 diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven
6 demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the
7 manager of Herod's household; Susanna and many
8 others. These women were helping to support them out
9 of their own means.

10 And a reading from the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 7,
11 verses 36 through 47:

12 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner
13 with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined
14 at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in
15 that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's
16 house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as
17 she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to
18 wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with
19 her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

20 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he
21 said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would
22 know who is touching him and what kind of woman she
23 is — that she is a sinner."

24 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to
25 tell you."

26 "Tell me, teacher," he said.

27 "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender.
28 One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.
29 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he
30 canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love
31 him more?"

32 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger
33 debt canceled."

34 "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

35 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon,

1 “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You
2 did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my
3 feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You
4 did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I
5 entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not
6 put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my
7 feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been
8 forgiven — for she loved much. But he who has been
9 forgiven little loves little.” (*SCRIPTURE READER exits.*
10 *MARY MAGDALENE enters and speaks at the pulpit.*)

11 **MARY MAGDALENE:** I am Mary Magdalene. The Scriptures
12 speak of me often. I followed the Lord from Galilee to
13 care for his needs, paying for his provisions from my own
14 means. I followed him everywhere until, at last, I
15 followed him to the cross, as he was hung up for all to
16 see. I was there when he cried out his final words, and
17 Joseph of Arimathea then gently took Jesus’ body down
18 from the tree of Calvary. Joseph laid the body of Jesus in
19 a tomb Joseph had obtained for his own burial. And I
20 was there when the rock sealed the entrance. Yes, I was
21 there sitting opposite the tomb. The sadness of it all
22 broke my heart into a thousand pieces. They had killed
23 my Lord.

24 I returned to the grave to anoint Jesus’ body on the
25 first day of the week after the Sabbath had ended. It was
26 then my mourning turned to joy, for angels had come
27 from heaven and rolled back the stone! They told me that
28 Jesus was not there. He had risen, just as he had said he
29 would. It was then the Lord Jesus himself appeared to
30 me, speaking my name so beautifully, “Mary.”

31 This is my name, Mary. But who am I, really? It will
32 forever remain a mystery, for the Scriptures do not
33 reveal who I was before the Lord touched my life. They
34 only reveal *what* I was after meeting Jesus: changed.
35 Changed forever.

1 Was I the woman whom the Pharisees told Jesus
 2 shouldn't be touching him because I was a sinner? Was
 3 I her? Could it be? This woman's story appears in the
 4 Gospel of Luke immediately before my name is
 5 mentioned as a follower of Jesus. Or was I the unnamed
 6 woman whom Jesus rescued from being stoned —
 7 stopping those who would kill her for the crime of
 8 sexual immorality by speaking only a handful of words:
 9 "He who is without sin, throw the first stone" (John 8:7,
 10 author's paraphrase).

11 Who am I? We will never know exactly, but this we *do*
 12 know: the Lord gave the Pharisees a parable of debts
 13 owed and debts canceled, comparing the largest debt
 14 canceled to the largest love given in response. Could my
 15 love for Jesus have been greater? I think not. I was the
 16 first to the tomb to anoint his body, and the first person
 17 the resurrected Lord spoke to when he found me there.

18 Who am I? Let us say this of who I am: I am love
 19 given, because of love received. My debt undoubtedly
 20 was enormous, for my love to Jesus was also enormous.
 21 And then my debt was covered. Covered by the grace of
 22 forgiveness — forgiven by the One who went to the
 23 cross and went to the grave for me. Because of love.
 24 Love had led the way. (*MARY MAGDALENE exits.*)

25

26 *Fourth Sunday of Lent (Pontius Pilate)*

27

28 (*SCRIPTURE READER steps up to the pulpit.*)

29 **SCRIPTURE READER:** A reading from the Gospel of Matthew,
 30 chapter 27, verses 11 through 20 and 24 through 25.

31 Meanwhile, Jesus stood before the governor Pontius
 32 Pilate, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of
 33 the Jews?"

34 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

35 When Jesus was accused by the chief priests and the

1 elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him,
2 “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against
3 you?” But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single
4 charge — to the great amazement of the governor.

5 Now it was the governor’s custom at the Feast to
6 release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time
7 they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So
8 when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them,
9 “Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas,
10 or Jesus who is called Christ?” For he knew it was out
11 of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.

12 While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife
13 sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with
14 that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal
15 today in a dream because of him.”

16 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the
17 crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

18 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but
19 that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and
20 washed his hands in front of the crowd. “I am innocent
21 of this man’s blood,” he said. “It is your responsibility!”

22 All the people answered, “Let his blood be on us and
23 on our children!” (*SCRIPTURE READER exits. PONTIUS
24 PILATE enters and speaks from the pulpit.*)

25 PONTIUS PILATE: I am Pontius Pilate, the Roman
26 governor whose authority ruled in the execution of
27 Jesus. I didn’t want to be the authority to decide his
28 fate. I had questioned Jesus and found *no reason* —
29 none at all — to sentence him to death like the chief
30 priests, scribes, and Pharisees were demanding of me.
31 *They* could not sentence Jesus to death — *but I could* —
32 and they knew this. Their council could condemn a man
33 and say he was worthy of death, but they needed the
34 final word from Rome itself to carry out the sentence.

35 And so it was I — as governor of Rome — who had the

1 final authority to execute Jesus. It was then I found out
2 Jesus was from Galilee, so I was relieved. As a Galilean,
3 Jesus was not subject to *my* rule, but to Herod's. So I
4 sent him over to Herod to be questioned, but Herod just
5 happened to be in Jerusalem at this same time. I
6 thought I was through with Jesus. But no. Herod, too,
7 examined him and could find no reason to condemn him,
8 as the religious leaders so desperately hoped. So Herod
9 sent Jesus back to me, because there was no basis for
10 the charges against him; he had done *nothing* to deserve
11 death. Jesus was, again, under my jurisdiction. Should
12 he live or should he die? It was *my* ruling that would
13 answer this question. *And I wanted nothing to do with*
14 *this man! Nothing!* He frightened me. He was accused of
15 claiming to be God. And what if he was? Do you think I
16 was prepared to give the final word on his execution?
17 Should *I* be the one to nail God to a cross?

18 I was nervous in simply questioning him. So silently,
19 so serenely he stood before his accusers as they hurled
20 their insults at him. He said *nothing*. He answered *none*
21 of their charges. If I had known the prophets foretold
22 the Messiah of God would lay down his life in silence
23 like a lamb is silent before it is slaughtered, I would
24 have been even more terrified. Terrified ... just like I
25 was when my wife came to me panic-stricken and
26 shaking, telling me of a dream she had just suffered.
27 She begged me not to have anything to do with that
28 innocent man. Those were her exact words: "*that*
29 *innocent man.*"

30 As you can imagine, I was overcome with nervousness
31 when I asked Jesus if he were a king, and he told me
32 that *he was* but that his kingdom was not of this world.
33 What was I supposed to do with an answer like that?

34 The chief priests were demanding Jesus' life for
35 saying he was a king and for opposing taxes to Caesar.

1 When I resisted condemning Jesus, the priests
2 immediately threw Jesus' opposition to Caesar in my
3 face, saying, "You're not a friend of Caesar's if you let
4 Jesus go! He's claiming to be a king." I suppose they
5 were right. By claiming to be a king, Jesus was in a
6 sense opposing Caesar, whom I was also afraid of.

7 What am I to do? I didn't want to kill him. The priests
8 did. I had decided to let him go. I *wanted* to let him go.
9 But the jealousy of the priests wouldn't allow it. Of
10 course they were jealous. Nothing could have been
11 more obvious. The people were following after Jesus
12 instead of them; the people were listening to Jesus
13 instead of to them. And now they demanded Jesus'
14 death so they could be done with him.

15 His charges? The priests accused him of stirring up
16 the people with his teaching. They accused him of
17 inciting the people to rebellion. And, of course, they
18 accused him of claiming to be God. And what if he is?
19 (*Pause*) What ... if ... he ... is?

20 There was one chance to alter the fate of Jesus. It is
21 the custom of the Jewish people to have one prisoner
22 released as a pardon at every Passover. This release is
23 granted by me, as governor. So I suggested to the crowd
24 that Jesus be released instead of being condemned. To
25 make sure they chose Jesus, I gave the choice of Jesus
26 or Barabbas, who was a notorious murderer. Of course
27 they would choose Jesus. When I offered the freeing of
28 Jesus, I used the name of Christ — meaning God's
29 anointed, God's Messiah, God's deliverer — because this
30 is *exactly* who Jesus was claiming to be.

31 And do you know who they chose to be set free? The
32 murderer. *How crazy is this?!* When I asked them what
33 I should then do with Jesus, they responded, "Crucify
34 him."

35 It was then I washed my hands before the crowd in a

1 bowl of water and said, "I am innocent of this man's
2 blood" (Matthew 27:24).

3 But then I turned Jesus over to be crucified. I
4 condemned him without evidence, without reason,
5 without anything. Such a spineless leader I was. This
6 was my reputation before I came face to face with
7 Jesus, and this is the reputation history remembers me
8 by. I had always tried to keep the people from uprising
9 at whatever the cost. And the cost today couldn't have
10 been higher. If this Jesus is who he says he is, God is
11 about to be nailed to a cross. And I had the final say.
12 (*PONTIUS PILATE exits.*)

13

14 *Fourth Sunday of Lent (Barabbas)*

15

16 (*SCRIPTURE READER stands at the pulpit.*)

17 **SCRIPTURE READER:** A reading from the Gospel of Luke,
18 chapter 23, verses 13 through 25, and the Gospel of
19 Mark, chapter 15, verses 16 through 20.

20 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and
21 the people, and said to them, "You brought me this
22 Jesus as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I
23 have examined him in your presence and have found no
24 basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod,
25 for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done
26 nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him
27 and then release him."

28 With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man!
29 Release Barabbas to us!" (Barabbas had been thrown
30 into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for
31 murder.)

32 Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them
33 again. But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify
34 him!"

35 For the third time Pilate spoke to them: "Why? What

1 crime has this man committed? I have found in him no
 2 grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have
 3 him punished and then release him.”

4 But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that
 5 he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. So Pilate
 6 decided to grant their demand. He released the man
 7 who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and
 8 murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus
 9 to their will.

10 The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is,
 11 the Praetorium) and called together the whole
 12 company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him,
 13 then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his
 14 head. And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of
 15 the Jews!” Again and again they struck him on the head
 16 with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they
 17 paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him,
 18 they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on
 19 him. Then they led him out to crucify him. (*SCRIPTURE*
 20 *READER exits. BARABBAS enters and speaks from the pulpit.*)

21 **BARABBAS:** I am Barabbas. Jerusalem knows me well.
 22 Murderer, insurrectionist, and the criminal set free at
 23 the Passover feast. It was the custom of the Jews to
 24 pardon one prisoner at the feast. Who would *ever* have
 25 thought it would be *me* as the one chosen to walk
 26 free — especially when there were only *two choices*:
 27 Jesus Christ or myself. His crime? He said he was God.
 28 And then because *I* was chosen to walk free — to go
 29 anywhere I pleased — I walked out to that cross and
 30 watched him die — agonizingly die — a wretched,
 31 horrid death. Nailed up there in place of me. (*Pause*)
 32 *Because he said he was God.* It didn’t make sense. It
 33 didn’t fit. Even I, Barabbas the murderer, knew this.

34 Jesus arrived in Jerusalem five days ago. I didn’t *see*
 35 him come because I was locked away in my prison cell.

1 But I *heard* him. They said he entered the city gates
2 riding on a donkey. Picture that. It was then the crowds
3 went wild with jubilation and started shouting, (*Shout*
4 *these next words*) “Hosanna! Hosanna! Blessed is he who
5 comes in the name of the Lord!” (Mark 11:9). Their voices
6 were deafening! I pressed my face against the bars of my
7 jail cell when I heard all the commotion coming from the
8 streets. “Hosannas” were echoing from the crowds. The
9 word means “Save us!” How strange that the crowds
10 who glorified him only five days ago were now shouting,
11 “Crucify him!” Strange. It didn’t make sense. It didn’t fit.
12 Even I, Barabbas the murderer, knew this.

13 I *saw* the nails being pounded into his flesh. I saw
14 this because I was free to go anywhere I wanted. And so
15 I went there.

16 Why were they doing this to this man? No one was
17 crucified by being nailed to a cross. You were supposed
18 to be *tied* to it. Tied, with ropes. Yet here they were,
19 (*Emphasize these next words dramatically*) **pounding,**
20 **pounding,** pounding those nails right through him. I
21 was sickened.

22 Do you have a crucifix hanging in your home, or a
23 painting of Christ’s last hours on his cross? Jesus is
24 depicted as having a beautiful, serene look on his face.
25 There is a trickle of blood at each hand, a trickle of
26 blood at his feet, and a trickle of blood on his forehead,
27 where a crown of thorns rests. Well, I am here to tell
28 you this: I was there — there weeping beneath him as
29 he hung up there instead of me — and it looked *nothing*
30 like that.

31 Jesus had been beaten. Severely. (*Emphasize all of these*
32 *next words slowly.*) **Flogged,** **whipped,** **slapped,** **spit on,**
33 **and hit in the head with a wooden pole again and again**
34 **and again and again.** And then they pressed a thorny
35 crown into his head. Have you ever pricked your finger

1 on the razor-sharp tip of a thorn? Can you imagine
 2 what it would feel like to have thorns crushed into your
 3 tender temples? Think about that. And then think about
 4 what *you* suppose Jesus looked like when they were
 5 through beating him. (*Pause. Say the next slowly.*) And the
 6 nails had not yet gone in.

7 His mother was there to see this, too. There she stood
 8 beside me, crying, crying. From the third hour until the
 9 sixth hour, she wept. I reached for her hand when Jesus
 10 looked down to speak with her. She trembled. This was
 11 *her Son*. How could she endure hearing the jeers and
 12 mocking of the crowd? They hurled insults, one after
 13 another. “Come down from the cross, if you are the Son
 14 of God!” (Matthew 27:40). Even the religious priests in
 15 their fine robes were there mocking him: “He saved
 16 others ... but he can’t save himself” (Matthew 27:42).
 17 Funny how they acknowledged Jesus had saved others.
 18 I don’t know much about religion and I don’t wear the
 19 fancy, flowing robes of these priests who *say* they are
 20 holy. I’ve never even been in the temple to pray, but this
 21 I do know: What was going on here didn’t make sense. It
 22 didn’t fit. Even I, Barabbas the murderer, knew this.

23 But then it happened, and I understood. Jesus turned
 24 to a thief hanging next to him and told him he would see
 25 him today in paradise. *In paradise*. The thief was going
 26 in to the same place of glory that Jesus would. Then
 27 Jesus looked over the hatred beneath him, looked upon
 28 those who insulted him and beat him, and said, “Forgive
 29 them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34, KJV).

30 Suddenly, it fit. (*Quietly*) Jesus had not only died
 31 instead of me, he died *instead of us all*. (*Yell these next*
 32 *words.*) Hosanna! Hosanna! Save us! (*Pause*) From whom?
 33 From ourselves. As only he could.

34 I understood. He hung up there on *my* behalf, and he
 35 hung up there *on yours*. Not because he *said* he was

1 God, but because *he is*.

2 There were two choices the day the sky turned black:
3 I, Barabbas, or Jesus the Christ. And the crowd chose
4 him. (*Long pause*) Thank God. (*BARABBAS exits.*)

5

6 *Fifth Sunday of Lent (Roman Soldier)*

7

8 (*SCRIPTURE READER steps up to the pulpit.*)

9 **SCRIPTURE READER:** So the soldiers took charge of Jesus.
10 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the
11 skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). Here they
12 crucified him, and with him two others — one on each
13 side and Jesus in the middle.

14 From the sixth hour until the ninth hour, darkness
15 came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus
16 cried out in a loud voice “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”
17 — which means, “My God, my God, why have you
18 forsaken me?”

19 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice,
20 he gave up his spirit.

21 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in
22 two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks
23 split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many
24 holy people who had died were raised to life. They came
25 out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they
26 went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

27 When the centurion and those with him who were
28 guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had
29 happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, “Surely
30 he was the Son of God!” (For reference only: John 19:16-18,
31 Matthew 27:45-46, 50-54.) (*SCRIPTURE READER exits.*
32 *ROMAN SOLDIER enters and speaks at the pulpit.*)

33 **ROMAN SOLDIER:** I was a Roman soldier. I was, and am no
34 more; my sword laid down at Calvary.

35 That’s where he died — Jesus. I saw it; I felt it; I was

1 there. And my voice was one of those that acknowledged,
2 “Surely he was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

3 We were engulfed in the darkness of a sun turned
4 black in the middle of the day. A sense of eerie
5 uneasiness was in the air. Then the earth began to shake,
6 as did the skies. Thunder above, thunder below. Roaring,
7 roaring.

8 Shouts were coming from the temple area: (*Shout the*
9 *next two sentences very loudly*) “The curtain has been torn
10 in two! The curtain has been torn in two!” Insignificant?
11 Hardly. This was no ordinary curtain; *this* was the
12 curtain of God. It was made of leather, as thick as a
13 man’s palm, and it hung from the towering ceiling of the
14 temple to the floor beneath. Human hands could
15 neither tear it nor part it. Once a year, only once, a
16 human was allowed to enter into the inner curtain area
17 where the very presence of God himself dwelt. On this
18 day, the great Day of Atonement, the High Priest went
19 within and laid an animal sacrifice on the altar inside,
20 exchanging the blood of the animal for the forgiven,
21 cleansed blood of the people. So if human hands could
22 not part the massive weight of the curtain, how then
23 did this priest get in? An ox was hooked to each side of
24 the curtain in order to part it just enough for him to slip
25 inside. And now it was torn, torn in two. *Torn* from top
26 to bottom. *Torn* from heaven to earth. *Torn* by the
27 Almighty hand of God. What did it mean? It meant this:
28 There would be *no more sacrifices* on that altar. There
29 would be *no more sacrifices* by priests exchanging the
30 blood of an animal for the cleansed blood of the people.
31 The sacrifices were over. They were done. Forever and
32 ever and ever. The last sacrifice before God had just
33 been made on a hill outside the temple, on a hill called
34 Calvary. And this sacrifice, this final sacrifice, had a
35 name. His name was Jesus. And now it was finished,

1 just as he said.

2 Jesus had another name, too. The angel had used it to
3 announce his coming and the prophet had used it to
4 foretell of his deliverance: Immanuel. The Messiah of God
5 would be called Immanuel. Its meaning? “God with us.”
6 The curtain had been torn in two so that the presence of
7 God would no longer dwell *apart* from the people — *apart*
8 from them inside the temple, *apart* from them behind a
9 holy curtain — but God’s presence would now dwell
10 *within* them. Because of Jesus. Because of Immanuel.

11 I had seen a lot of things in my day, but as battle-
12 scarred and war-weary as I was, *nothing* could have
13 prepared me for what I saw after the Crucifixion. I saw
14 men and women thrown into a den of lions and eaten
15 alive because they claimed the name of Jesus as their
16 Lord and Savior. I saw crowds cheer and applaud wildly
17 at the sight of this. Follower after follower of Christ was
18 faced with such an ultimatum from those who opposed
19 them: choose between your faith and your life. To deny
20 Jesus was to pardon themselves from execution. How
21 simple, how easy. Their decision? They denied nothing.
22 Unthreatened, unshaken, undaunted, they clung to the
23 name of Jesus. How? *How* could they do this? *What*
24 enabled them to be empowered by such courage? Not
25 how, not what, but who. Immanuel. God within them.
26 Jesus had promised, “I am with you always, to the very
27 end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). (*Say each of the following*
28 *persecutions slowly, pausing in between each so that the*
29 *sacrifice each made can be absorbed.*) And because of this,
30 because Jesus was with him and within him, Stephen
31 willingly was stoned to death, and James was murdered
32 by the sword. Matthew was slain in Ethiopia, and Mark
33 was dragged through the streets until dead. Luke,
34 hanged. Andrew, tied to a cross. Matthias, stoned. Simon
35 crucified like the Lord Jesus. Phillip, both crucified and

1 stoned. Thomas, pierced with lances. Bartholomew,
2 flayed alive. James, the less, thrown off the top of the
3 temple and then beaten to death. Jude, shot to death
4 with arrows. Peter, crucified upside down. Mark it well.
5 This faith of ours — its history — is written in blood;
6 that of Jesus and that of his followers, who paid for their
7 message with their lives.

8 Rome thought she was mighty, and she thought she
9 had power. For a little while longer she will stand, but
10 the day is coming when she will stand no more —
11 brought to her knees by these Christians. Mighty
12 Rome's "Hail Caesars" will be silenced by those walking
13 in the power of another name: Jesus. Jesus. King Jesus.
14 And he shall reign forever and ever (Revelation 11:15)
15 with glory and power and honor.

16 Rome's greatest weapon against God was a sword to
17 kill with; Christianity's greatest weapon was a heart
18 willing to die. Which of these was stronger in the end?
19 The heart. The heart of love and light triumphant. How
20 do you stop such a force? You can't, and you don't.
21 Rome learned this as she died watching Christianity
22 live.

23 Calvary. It is an intense picture of death, and an
24 intense picture of life. It is a place of many ironies. Look
25 closely and you will see. Jesus died there so that we
26 could live. Death and life were both at Calvary. In this
27 place of deepest darkness, light would find its way —
28 the light of life eternal. Darkness and light were both at
29 Calvary. In this place of deepest hate, we would forever
30 remember this scene as the picture of the greatest love.
31 Why was Jesus on that cross? Because God so loved the
32 world. Hatred and love were both at Calvary. Its
33 message, a personal one from God. It is a message
34 beyond the life we live in the body; it is a message of the
35 eternal life of the soul. And this message cost God

1 something. It got personal; real, real personal. Because
2 God so loved, he gave ... his Son. And I saw it all.
3 *(ROMAN SOLDIER exits.)*
4

5 *Fifth Sunday of Lent (Malchus)*
6

7 *(SCRIPTURE READER stands at the pulpit.)*

8 **SCRIPTURE READER:** A reading from the Gospels of Luke
9 and John.

10 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his
11 disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other
12 side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples
13 went into it.

14 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place,
15 because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So
16 Judas came to the grove, guiding a detachment of
17 soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and
18 Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and
19 weapons.

20 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him,
21 went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

22 "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

23 "I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was
24 standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he,"
25 they drew back and fell to the ground.

26 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and
27 struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right
28 ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)

29 Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away!
30 Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"
31 Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander
32 and the Jewish officials arrested Jesus.

33 Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the
34 temple guard, and the elders, who had come for him, "Am
35 I leading a rebellion, that you have come with swords

1 and clubs? Every day I was with you in the temple courts,
 2 and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour
 3 — when darkness reigns.” (For reference only: John 18:1-6,
 4 10-12 and Luke 22:52-53.) (*SCRIPTURE READER exits.*
 5 *MALCHUS enters and speaks from the pulpit.*)

6 **MALCHUS, THE HIGH PRIEST’S SERVANT:** My name is
 7 Malchus, servant to the high priest. I was with the mob
 8 that had assembled and was heading for the Garden of
 9 Gethsemane, a mob made up of chief priests, officers
 10 from the temple guard, elders, and soldiers. It was
 11 rumored Jesus — the One claiming to be the Christ —
 12 was there, and if he was, he was going to be arrested.

13 Judas led the way. He knew the place well. He
 14 himself had gone there often with Jesus. He told us so.
 15 And Gethsemane was where Jesus chose to be before
 16 his death.

17 Gethsemane. Its meaning? “Place of crushing.” It was
 18 an olive grove with an olive press there in its midst, a
 19 large press. Above it, a huge rock would be lowered
 20 down, and with the great pressure and force of its
 21 weight, the olives would be crushed to pieces, crushed to
 22 mangled nothingness. The result? A valuable one: olive
 23 oil, a major marketing crop for our area. Press and
 24 crush, press and crush, such was the activity of
 25 Gethsemane.

26 Did Jesus feel the pressure of this place, this place of
 27 crushing? We are told he prayed, we are told he wept,
 28 and we are told he was overwhelmed with sorrow to the
 29 point of death. And then sweat broke out of him in
 30 drops of blood falling to the ground. Jesus was sweating
 31 blood there in Gethsemane.

32 He was on his way to the cross, and he knew it. He
 33 was on his way to redeem the sins of all of mankind, and
 34 he knew it. How heavy do you suppose the sins of the
 35 entire world are? How much did they weigh? How

1 heavy upon Jesus were those sins that night, that night
2 of darkness in Gethsemane? They were heavy enough to
3 turn his sweat to blood. Crushing, crushing upon Jesus
4 were the sins of the world. And the result of this
5 crushing would yield something far more valuable than
6 oil. The crushing on this night would result in the
7 valuable blood of a Savior being shed.

8 His prayer there in the garden was a simple one: “Not
9 what I will, but what You will, Father, be done” (Mark
10 14:36, author’s paraphrase). He was ready to go to the
11 cross ... and we were here to take him.

12 We entered the garden, and Jesus met us. He must
13 have heard us coming. He came toward us asking, “Who
14 is it you want?”

15 “Jesus of Nazareth,” we replied.

16 And then he answered — a frightening answer. We
17 drew back and fell to the ground when we heard it: “I
18 am.”

19 To understand why we fell before him, one must
20 understand the ancient language spoken here. Jesus
21 had not used a simple noun and verb, as in “I am going
22 to the market.” He had used the very name of God — the
23 great “I Am.” The name God himself had given to Moses.

24 It wasn’t the first time Jesus had used it. He had used
25 it once before when speaking to these same chief
26 priests. He told them, “Before Abraham was ... I Am”
27 (John 8:58). They challenged him, “You’re not even fifty
28 years old, and you’re claiming to have seen Abraham
29 who walked the earth over three thousand years ago?”
30 Jesus was not only claiming *to have seen* Abraham, he
31 was claiming *to have existed* before Abraham was even
32 born — existed as God.

33 Was Jesus the great I Am? I wondered this as we rose
34 again to our feet. It was then — suddenly and without
35 expectation — that one of Jesus’ followers grabbed a

1 sword and cut off my ear. *He cut off my ear!* There it lay
 2 on the ground beneath me — my ear. I was horrified and
 3 screaming in pain until Jesus bent over, picked it up off
 4 the ground, and put it back on the side of my head. I was
 5 healed. Just like that. No pain, no anything. Healed.

6 Was Jesus the great I Am? The ear he reattached to
 7 the side of my head was proof enough for me. I left. If
 8 Jesus was to be arrested, it would *not* be at my hands.
 9 The last thing I heard as I walked out of the garden was
 10 Jesus saying: “Do you think I cannot call on my Father,
 11 and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve
 12 legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53).

13 Seventy-two thousand angels would have shown up
 14 at Gethsemane to rescue him. Right then and there. All
 15 he had to do was say the word. Jesus didn’t *have* to go
 16 to the cross, and he knew it. He had a choice. He could
 17 have walked away from it all, like I did. He had the
 18 power to do so and the power to say, “I’m not going to
 19 the cross. I’m not going anywhere.” Jesus had been
 20 given the authority to lay his life down or to take it up
 21 by God the Father. Yes, he could have been rescued
 22 from it all. The angels would have come, they were
 23 standing ready. But then *who would have rescued us?*
 24 Jesus’ embrace of death was going to be our embrace of
 25 life. He knew this. All too well. And for this reason, this
 26 reason alone, he had come — had come and entered
 27 human flesh, to give his flesh as payment for the life of
 28 the world. His very name — Jesus — in its Hebrew
 29 tongue means “He will save.” Thus the name Jesus was
 30 more than what the Son of God would be called, it was
 31 what he would do.

32 And so willingly Jesus allowed them to arrest him
 33 and bind him and lead him out of Gethsemane, where
 34 the crushing had begun. (*MALCHUS exits.*)

35



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