

AT THE CROSS

by Bradley N. Hill



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At the Cross

Biblical monologs
with Lenten candles

by Bradley N. Hill

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PRODUCTION NOTES

The season of Lent tells the story of the Passion. These monologs are designed to tell the story of Jesus' arrest, trial, mistreatment, death, and resurrection from several points of view. They are to be read with the extinguishing of each Lenten candle.

The setting is a post-resurrection reunion of these people, as if they were invited by Peter to share their testimonies with your church.

Minimal costuming is required. A simple tunic for the men and a headscarf for the women would suffice.

Props are not needed. Simon of Cyrene refers to a sliver in the first monolog, but this may be pantomimed.

There are a few instances where one or several people speak from the congregation. Use any actors who are not participating in that Sunday's performance to fill in. (These parts are brief.)

These monologs may be used in conjunction with Lenten candles. Six candles may be arranged as a wreath, or in a row across the altar, or on an ascending/descending candelabra. The Christ candle sits separately.

On the first Sunday in Lent, all the candles are already lit. Early in each worship service, Peter will come forward and invite the person giving the testimony. After the testimony is given, Peter will extinguish one Lenten candle. One candle is extinguished each Sunday until finally the Christ candle is extinguished on Good Friday. On Easter, all the candles are again lit, or just the Christ candle remains and is lit.

First Sunday of Lent

Simon of Cyrene

(Based on Luke 23:26)

(The service begins with all seven candles lit. PETER enters to introduce SIMON OF CYRENE.)

PETER: Greetings to you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am Peter, a follower of Jesus. Thank you all for inviting us here to your church to share our stories. I have asked several men and women who were with Jesus on that final Friday to share their stories. The first is Simon. Simon ...? *(SIMON OF CYRENE enters as PETER steps aside.)*

SIMON OF CYRENE: I am Simon. Peter asked me to tell this story before it was lost to all the churches. I am Simon of Cyrene, just so you don't confuse me with Simon Peter or Simon the brother of James and Jude or Simon the Leper or the Pharisee or the father of Judas Iscariot or that magician living in Samaria. So many Simons! I am from Cyrene, just off the north coast of Africa. Many years before, my father returned from a trade mission to Jerusalem and declared that we, even though we are Greek, were now to believe in the one and only God of the Jews.

For years I had yearned to go to Jerusalem to attend the great Passover feast. It was not until I was grown and a father myself that I was able to make that great journey. What a celebration that was ... but my story really begins on the fifth day of the week. A tremendous noise drew me, and I pushed my way into the crowd, shouting, "What is going on?" They said that Jesus, the one they thought could have been the Messiah we were all waiting for, was on the way to Golgotha to be crucified. Messiah Jesus, crucified? I had so many questions!

1 A guard of soldiers came along, pushing the crowd
2 back with whips and staves. They retreated a bit, but I
3 stood my ground, suddenly in the forefront of the
4 crowd. I could see Jesus laboring up the hill under the
5 weight of his own cross. Some people in the crowd wept.
6 Others tossed garbage and spat on him. He was
7 bloodied from head to foot, his clothes torn, his feet
8 ripped to shreds, his back bowed under the weight of
9 that cross. He toiled on, one foot and then the next. It
10 was a long way to the top of that hill. As he approached
11 me, he looked up and our eyes met. I could see his pain,
12 but also the depth of love he carried. I detected the
13 faintest smile, then he collapsed at my feet. He didn't
14 move. A soldier stabbed him in the back with his stave
15 and shouted, "Get up! Get up!" But he did not get up.
16 The Centurion ordered the soldier to stop jabbing at
17 him. Everything came to a halt. Then the crowd began
18 to press in.

19 The Centurion looked around at the crowd, then
20 right at me, probably because I was darker than the
21 others, being Cyrenian. He spoke to me in Greek and
22 said, "You, pick up that cross." I could not retreat
23 through the solid wall of flesh behind me. The
24 Centurion's hand on his dagger left me no choice. I
25 stooped down and struggled to grasp it. It was
26 awkward. I staggered. They made these crosses out of
27 solid wood! I managed to hoist it onto my shoulder and
28 balance it. It would be a long, hard slog to the top, even
29 for me. The Centurion gently pulled Jesus to his feet.
30 Jesus turned to me and said, "Thank you, brother," then
31 turned to face the hill ahead.

32 I watched him as we struggled upward, upward. I
33 will not describe what happened next. The others you'll
34 meet will tell the story. But what I saw and heard on the
35 cross that day changed me forever. I was honored to

1 carry the cross of Christ, the one who called me brother
 2 and changed my life forever. My sons Rufus and
 3 Alexander became Christians. The apostle Paul even
 4 knows them.

5 But that day the blood of this Jesus was all over me.
 6 We shared slivers from the same cross. *(Holds up a sliver.)*
 7 I will follow him anywhere. My name is Simon. I am
 8 from Cyrene. *(PETER extinguishes the first candle, then he*
 9 *and SIMON OF CYRENE exit.)*

10

11

12

13

Second Sunday of Lent

14

A Lamenting Woman

15

(Based on Luke 23:17; 8:2,3)

16

17 *(The service begins with all the candles lit except for one.*

18

PETER enters.)

19

PETER: Hello again, everyone. Thanks again for inviting us
 20 all here to share our stories. Wasn't Simon's story
 21 powerful? When he held up that sliver from the cross, I
 22 nearly broke down!

23

24

25

26

This morning I want to introduce to you another
friend and sister in Christ from the city of Nain who
was delivered — well, I will let her tell the story. (PETER
steps aside as LAMENTING WOMAN enters.)

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LAMENTING WOMAN: Thank you, Peter, for asking me to
 share a part of my story. My name isn't important. I am
 a follower of this man Jesus, from Capernaum, near the
 city of Nain. A couple of years ago Jesus came through
 there. He cured many people of their diseases and
 afflictions and evil spirits, and he granted sight to many
 who were blind. I was one of those healed of evil spirits
 and sickness. Mary Magdalene is a friend of mine, and
 so is Joanna, wife of King Herod's steward. You've

1 probably heard of them, but you likely haven't heard of
2 me. I just stayed in the background. I helped Jesus and
3 the others by cooking and cleaning, and since I had a
4 little money, I paid for a few things along the way as I
5 mostly just wanted to be near and hear this man. I knew
6 he was the Messiah long before Peter finally figured it
7 out, but I didn't dare say it.

8 I knew in my heart it was all going to lead to this one
9 day. Jesus said he would go to Jerusalem and die. I
10 knew the religious rulers as well and was sure they
11 would not tolerate him much longer. The news of his
12 arrest and scourging traveled fast. This upheaval was a
13 prelude to crucifixion, and we all knew it. There was
14 one road that led to Skull Hill, and that was where I
15 planted myself. The criminals always carried their
16 crosses up this hill — the “path of suffering,” we called
17 it. Soon the streets were lined. I could hear the uproar
18 rolling up the hill toward me, marking the march of
19 Jesus. The keening of the women pierced the sky. His
20 bloody back was bowed, but his head was tilted up,
21 looking toward Calvary. His breathing was raspy and
22 harsh, uneven. Each step he took left a damp footprint
23 behind.

24 Just as he passed, I stepped out and began to follow.
25 I had taken no more than a few steps when he turned,
26 as if he knew I was there. He said, “Daughters of
27 Jerusalem, stop weeping for me, but weep for
28 yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days
29 are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren,
30 and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that
31 never nursed.’ Then they will begin to say to the
32 mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For
33 if they do these things when the tree is green, what will
34 happen when it is dry?” (*Luke 23:28-31*).

35 I stopped then and let the crowd swirl past me. I

1 would not — could not — watch him suffer any longer.
 2 Yes, I weep for myself and for the children. What
 3 terrible judgment will fall on Jerusalem now? Jesus,
 4 Jesus, I do weep for you — and for me. How I wish you
 5 had never gone to Jerusalem. (*PETER extinguishes*
 6 *another candle, then both exit.*)

7

8

9

10

Third Sunday of Lent

11

The Sneering Ruler

12

(Based on Luke 23:35)

13

14 (*The service begins with the Christ candle and four other candles*
 15 *lit. PETER enters.*)

16 **PETER:** This amazing story of Jesus continues! Next I'd like
 17 to invite —

18 **SNEERING RULER:** (*Walks up briskly and a bit arrogantly. There*
 19 *is a bit of hubbub — noise that is prearranged among the other*
 20 *ACTORS. PETER steps aside.*) Yes, yes, I know. I am not
 21 invited here, am I? You recognize me, no doubt, as a
 22 member of the Sanhedrin, your ruling council. Show
 23 some respect. And you, Joseph of Arimathea. I should
 24 have known you would be here! I have heard all this
 25 slobbering drivel. I would expect it from you. It is fine to
 26 weep and sorrow, but let's not lie to each other. We as a
 27 people have been plagued with false messiahs and
 28 pretentious saviors. I just couldn't pass up this
 29 opportunity to remind you of a few things.

30 I watched him die on the cross. Now, listen to me.
 31 First, all such pretenders fail. And so has he. Second,
 32 when the Romans kill such imposters, they also kill
 33 dozens of us Jews. You just watch what happens to his
 34 disciples now. Third, no Messiah, no so-called Son of God,
 35 would die on a cross, because our prophet said, "Cursed

1 is everyone who hangs on a tree” (*Galatians 3:13*). Fourth,
 2 people say he did miracles, healed the blind, and even
 3 raised people from the dead. I never saw any of these
 4 miracles, of course — I just heard secondhand gossip.
 5 But he sure doesn’t seem to be performing any great
 6 resurrection miracle now, does he? He saved others. Why
 7 can’t he save himself now if he is the Son of God, his
 8 chosen one? Fifth, he can’t be the Messiah because he is
 9 from Nazareth, and as we all know, nothing good can
 10 come out of Nazareth. Sixth, the Messiah must come from
 11 the line of David, and this man, well, we don’t even know
 12 who his father is, do we? I mean, really! Seventh, for all
 13 his great teaching and miracles, how many disciples does
 14 he have? I hear he had a dozen — now eleven. Even one
 15 of his own betrayed him. He never completed his
 16 rabbinical studies. When he *did* preach, he was chased
 17 out of the synagogue. His own family thinks he is insane
 18 (*There is a protest from the crowd. SNEERING RULER waves it*
 19 *off.*) and tried to intervene and rescue him. So, folks,
 20 Jesus dying is a good thing. No more illusions. You will
 21 see that one day soon, I hope — before it is too late.
 22 (*SNEERING RULER sits down. Let a moment pass, then*
 23 *PETER snuffs out the third candle and exits.*)
 24
 25
 26

27 Fourth Sunday of Lent

28 Jesus’ Mother

29 (*Based on John 19:25*)

30 (*The service begins with the Christ candle and three other*
 31 *candles lit. PETER enters.*)

32 **PETER:** Hearing the words from one of our rulers was
 33 painful, wasn’t it? It looked like some of you wanted to
 34 jump up and silence him by force. Jesus would not have
 35 us do that. Whatever we accomplish in his name will also

1 be done in his way.

2 Now I'd like to invite someone who was there from the
3 beginning — his mother, Mary. She has so many stories
4 to tell about Jesus, but I asked her to focus on those last
5 hours. Mary ... ? (*JESUS' MOTHER enters as PETER steps*
6 *aside.*)

7 **JESUS' MOTHER:** Thank you, Peter, for inviting us to share.

8 I am Mary, Jesus' mother, if you don't know me. I was at
9 the cross also. I knew that was where it would all end, so
10 I just waited there. I watched as the crowd poured out of
11 the city. They followed my son and Simon of Cyrene, who
12 carried his cross. I prayed to the Lord to give me
13 strength for this day. It was unbearable. It still is. I will
14 not — cannot — describe the Crucifixion to you. They
15 raised him up, and I could see him looking out over Zion,
16 the so-called City of God. Mary the wife of Clopas and
17 Mary Magdalene held me up, or else I would have
18 fainted.

19 John was nearby. Dear John. Whatever would I have
20 done without him? My son. There he was, silhouetted
21 against the darkening sky, gasping for breath,
22 suffocating ... (*A momentary lapse*) I wanted to say
23 something, but what could I say? Yes, that Pharisee was
24 right. The family had come to intervene at one point, to
25 protect him from all the madness. And he said, "Who is
26 my mother and who are my brothers, but those who do
27 the will of God?" I was rebuked, and I confess. After all, I
28 knew who his Father was: God himself. I should have
29 known better. The old man Simeon from the temple had
30 clearly said that a sword would pierce my soul, and it did
31 that day.

32 Then he spoke. It was a hoarse whispering — a
33 gasping sound from the cross. I could hardly hear it. He
34 said, "Woman, behold your son!" And I did. I looked
35 intently at him. He was my son. At that moment, I was so

1 proud. Nothing they could do to him would make him
 2 anything other than what he was; no nails or whips or
 3 crosses could deter him from being about his Father's
 4 business, something he had said back when we forgot
 5 him in Jerusalem so many years ago. And somehow what
 6 he was doing on the cross was his Father's business.

7 Then he spoke again and said, "Behold your mother!"
 8 Who was he speaking to? Then I discerned that he was
 9 speaking to John. Even at his dying moment he was
 10 thinking of me, wanting to be sure I was taken care of.
 11 John then protectively stepped closer to me, and there
 12 we stood until he died. I would like to tell you what
 13 happened later, but Peter said just to share what
 14 happened that day. When it got dark — what a strange
 15 darkness, for it was only noon — we headed home, with
 16 our hearts darkened as well. (*PETER extinguishes the fourth*
 17 *candle, then escorts JESUS' MOTHER back to her seat.*)

21 Fifth Sunday of Lent

22 John

23 (*Based on John 19:27*)

24
 25 (*The service begins with the Christ candle and two other candles*
 26 *lit. PETER enters.*)

27 PETER: Mary's story has so much more to it. We will need to
 28 hear more about Jesus' miraculous birth and how the
 29 angel came to her ... but that's another story for another
 30 time. But right now John is here. Jesus loved us all, but
 31 he seemed to have a special place in his heart for John.
 32 John, won't you come and share with us? (*PETER steps*
 33 *aside as JOHN enters.*)

34 JOHN: Hello. Thanks, Peter, for asking me to share about
 35 that day on Calvary. I want so badly to talk about what

1 happened three days afterward, but we will have time
2 for that later. To understand everything that happened,
3 we have to understand Jesus' death. I was there at the
4 foot of the cross. As Mary his mother said, I was standing
5 near her. I remember the Centurion and the other
6 soldiers there. I remember you. (*Points to the PHARISEE —*
7 *anybody planted in the crowd.*) God will judge you!

8 PHARISEE: (*Shouts back.*) Watch out for your own judgment,
9 coming sooner rather than later!

10 JOHN: (*Regains composure.*) Yes, well, God will judge us all,
11 won't he? Anyway, I was present for the whole awful
12 event. When they arrested him, I fled like all the others,
13 but I headed toward the house of the high priest. I knew
14 people there, so they let me in. Later I let Peter in. I could
15 do nothing, of course. I watched as they led him in and
16 out and held this mockery of a trial. I watched as they
17 stood him before the people and asked, "Do you want
18 Jesus or Barabbas?!" I watched as they spat on him and
19 stripped him and scourged him. I watched the top of the
20 cross ahead of me as I trailed behind the crowd, toiling
21 up the hill. I watched as they drove in the spikes. And I
22 watched Mary, his mother.

23 I thought back to just a couple of nights before. We
24 were so comfortable with each other, reclining around
25 the table and eating together. I was closest to Jesus. In
26 fact, I was the one who asked Jesus who would betray
27 him and watched as he and Judas dipped the food into
28 the bowl.

29 It seems that all I did was stand by and watch. Jesus
30 said to me, "Behold your mother." I knew what he meant.
31 On one level, he simply wanted me to take care of her.
32 But on another level, he was saying that a new family
33 was being formed in his blood, that his blood would now
34 take precedence over bloodlines. Yes, I did take in Mary
35 and honored her and cared for her as my own mother.

1 But I tell you this: I am done just watching. Something
 2 happened that shattered my world that day in
 3 Jerusalem. And it wasn't just the discovery that I could
 4 run faster than Peter ... but I am exceeding my bounds
 5 here. Maybe I can share more later. Thank you. (*PETER*
 6 *snuffs the flame on the fifth candle and they exit.*)

7

8

9

10

Sixth Sunday of Lent

11

Barabbas

12

(Based on Luke 23:8-25)

13

14 (*The service begins with the Christ candle and one other candle*
 15 *lit. PETER enters.*)

16 **PETER:** Many of you will be surprised to hear from this next
 17 person. He has done hard time in jail for murder. In some
 18 ways, he owes more to Jesus than any of us. (*PETER steps*
 19 *aside as BARABBAS enters.*)

20 **BARABBAS:** My name is Barabbas. Yes, *that* Barabbas.
 21 Thanks, Peter, for asking me to tell a bit of what I saw
 22 the day Jesus died. My name means “son of the
 23 father” — bar, abba. Maybe you even heard Jesus teach
 24 us to pray, “Abba, Father.” That is a bit of irony for me.
 25 My name just happens to be “son of the father,” but Jesus
 26 is the true Son of the Father. I have changed a lot. I have
 27 given my life to Christ. But that is not what I am
 28 supposed to talk about right now. I was in jail for murder
 29 and insurrection against Rome. I was stupid enough to
 30 get caught, of course. And yes, I was guilty of both. My
 31 trial had already been held, and the verdict was death, of
 32 course. It was not much of a trial — apparently about like
 33 the one Jesus got. Again, a strange connection to this
 34 man. I was just waiting for my final punishment, which
 35 was to take place very soon.

1 I could hear a commotion outside. Only later I
2 understood that it was the crowd watching the
3 scourging of Jesus. At one point I heard the crowd cry
4 out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” again and again. I knew
5 it was for me. Pilate often gave the people a choice of
6 choosing death by decapitation or crucifixion. I
7 collapsed onto the floor. I had hoped for the merciful
8 death.

9 Soon I heard the stamp of soldiers’ feet coming to get
10 him. The keys jangled in the lock, and then they dragged
11 me out into the courtyard. I saw Jesus struggling
12 underneath his cross, just beginning to carry it toward
13 that horrible hill. I am not strong. I don’t have that kind
14 of courage. I sobbed and dropped to the paving stones.
15 “No, no. Please don’t!” I cried.

16 The soldier kicked me in the ribs and said, “Get up.
17 Get out of here. Go!” It had to be a trap, a way to spear
18 me as I supposedly escaped — but that would be better
19 than crucifixion. I stood up. He said again, “Go. Pilate
20 has substituted that man for you.” They turned and left.
21 It was the truth. The truth had set me free.

22 I stood and watched as Jesus hefted the cross and
23 began his journey, staggering under its weight. I
24 watched until he faded from view up that painful path. I
25 was free, he was condemned. I was alive, soon he would
26 be dead. He had taken my place on the cross.

27 But why did the crowd choose me instead of him? Who
28 did they think I was? Or rather, who did they think he
29 was?

30 Well, my time is up. I did answer the questions of who
31 he was and who I am — that is why I am here today. But
32 that’s for another time. (*PETER snuffs out the sixth candle*
33 *and they exit.*)

34
35

Good Friday

Joseph of Arimathea

(Based on Luke 23:50-56)

(The service begins with only the Christ candle lit. PETER enters.)

PETER: Shalom once again to you all. May the peace of God be with you all. We are very close now to the end of these stories. We have heard from many people: Jesus' disciple, his mother, his opponents, and those transformed by this man Jesus. Maybe the last person to touch Jesus in the flesh was Joseph, who is from Arimathea. Let's hear from him. *(PETER steps aside as JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA enters.)*

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHEA: My name is Joseph. If you get confused by the number of Marys, then you might be baffled by all the Josephs. I am not Mary's husband. I am from Arimathea and am, or rather was, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council of Jewish elders. Some time ago a friend and colleague of mine, Nicodemus, had a talk with Jesus. He told me about it, and I began my own research into this man Jesus. To make a long story short, I did eventually believe he was the Messiah, the Son of God, our Savior and Lord. However, I confess this: that I was afraid of losing my position on the Sanhedrin. So I kept my devotion to him secret. Nicodemus knew, but he was almost there himself and said nothing, just waiting for the kingdom of God. I was appalled at the way the head priest and the other council members treated Jesus. It was a mockery of a trial. I cast a dissenting vote when they elected to condemn him and send him to Pilate. I am, I pray, a man of honor, and this was not just. But it was to no avail.

Herod mocked him. Pilate caved in to the pressure of the Jewish leaders. In his fear of his Roman masters, he appeased them by condemning Jesus to death. In great



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