



drama by george

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Easter Readings

By George Halitzka

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We Want Barabbus!

(Mark 15:6-15)

By George Halitzka

STORYTELLER

A condemned man waits.

The night is eternal; sleepless. The end will arrive at a preset time and place in a predetermined manner. It looms over every thought. The mind hauntingly probes: "How bad will it hurt?" "Will I cry; will I soil myself?" "Was my life worth the oxygen I used?" "Was I bad enough to deserve this?" "Will anybody remember me without hate?" "What lies in the Undiscovered Country--beyond the moment of reckoning?" The fear and anticipated relief from all fear are equally palpable.

Morning. The door opens; the guards enter. The stuporous prisoner is half-dragged through the corridor. Dead man walking.

His crimes were barbarous--men knifed in the streets. Revolutionary intentions; treasonous actions. A rebellion was begun; enemy blood was spilled. The Cause was higher than the law; higher than life. But was it worth *this*?

The executioner awaits; the next turn will surely reveal his steely face. But the corridor does not lead to the block. It winds upwards to a spacious porch. In the center, on a throne, the governor. On one side, a bleeding man in a purple robe and a prickly crown. Below, a mob. Chanting his name--"We want Barabbus!"

The governor unfeelingly waves his hand. The chains are removed. His life is spared. He blinks in the sunlight; almost passes out. He is roughly shoved towards the mob that calculatingly gave him his life to impose its horrible will on another. He is in shock; he falls to his knees. From his prone position, between the heads of the rabble, he sees another man shoved towards the cross.

Barabbus felt as though he alone gave the push that sent the purple-robed man to his death.

But he didn't. He had your help.

(END)

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Veil of Darkness

(Matthew 27:45-56)

By George Halitzka

STORYTELLER 1

It was thick and complete--not a storm; not an eclipse.

STORYTELLER 2

A veil of shadows thicker and more fearsome than night enveloped Skull Hill. Wrath shattered rocks; justice shook the firmament.

STORYTELLER 1

From every soul in every village in every nation, treachery and greed and debauchery and idolatry and deceit had been collected, drawn with irresistible force, and concentrated with crushing intensity on the dislocated shoulders of a broken human body.

STORYTELLER 2

Now a veil of blackness broke the communion of the Father and the Son, intact since eternity--a separation of holiness from the sin of the world.

STORYTELLER 1

The intimate fellowship of God and God that will never end; a marriage of Essences inconceivable to limited, flesh-bound humans--was broken.

STORYTELLER 2

Purity Himself could not gaze upon filth. The veil of darkness fell between Father and Son.

(Pause.)

STORYTELLER 1

It is customary at Easter to discuss the process of crucifixion in great detail.

STORYTELLER 2

The thorns; the nails; the blood; the spear.

STORYTELLER 1

But the greatest suffering Jesus endured was none of the above.

STORYTELLER 2

When the Son of Man was crushed by every sin and the eternal intimacy of the Trinity was torn asunder--that was the moment when Jesus' soul screamed in agony. He cried out when the veil of darkness fell.

STORYTELLER 1

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

STORYTELLER 2

Never were truer words spoken.

STORYTELLER 1

Jesus, who had known nothing but love for all eternity . . . was abandoned by its Source when darkness fell.

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The Rest of the Prophecy

(Isaiah 53, Luke 23:50-24:12)

By George Halitzka

STORYTELLER 1

Nobody really expected the rest of the prophesy to come true.

STORYTELLER 2

The first part of Isaiah's prediction had already been fulfilled--

STORYTELLER 1

the "despised and rejected," "smitten and afflicted" part.

STORYTELLER 2

But the rest of the story--where it said Jesus would "see His offspring" and "prolong His days"--

STORYTELLER 1

nobody really believed *that* part.

STORYTELLER 2

The disciples were all playing ostrich in some rented room on the wrong side of the tracks.

STORYTELLER 1

Jesus' mother and Mary Magdalene went to the tomb, but only to find out where they should come to embalm Him later.

STORYTELLER 2

The Jewish leaders didn't expect a resurrection; their only interest was preventing a hoax.

STORYTELLER 1

Now, Jesus' death did bring a couple of Closet Disciples into the open, but even they weren't looking for miracles.

STORYTELLER 2

Joseph of Arimathia was a secret member of Christ's fan club who also served on the Jewish ruling council. He found the guts to ask Pilate for Jesus' body.

STORYTELLER 1

Nicodemus, who wouldn't be caught dead with Jesus before, came along to help.

STORYTELLER 2

Maybe those two figured if Jesus was gone, they couldn't get in trouble any more.

STORYTELLER 1

Maybe they felt guilty for not sticking by Him when He was alive, and decided to do too little-too late.

STORYTELLER 2

But in any case, they definitely expected the Rabbi to stay dead!

(A brief pause.)

STORYTELLER 1

And very little has changed in two thousand years.

STORYTELLER 2

Jesus still has Closet Disciples like Joseph, who won't admit to knowing Him until it's perfectly safe.

STORYTELLER 1

Others, like Peter and the Boys, run away at the first sign of danger.

STORYTELLER 2

Some claim to follow Him, but like the Marys, only visit the cross and the tomb--they don't encounter the risen Christ.

STORYTELLER 1

Some pharisees still care more about maintaining the *status quo* than encountering the Messiah.

STORYTELLER 2

But at least all of them had an excuse--the resurrection hadn't happened yet.

STORYTELLER 1

They had every reason to expect Jesus to stay in the tomb; every reason to believe their Messiah-Radar had malfunctioned; every reason to think Jesus wasn't actually God.

STORYTELLER 2

You don't.

STORYTELLER 1

This Easter, are you living radically in the light of the resurrection?

STORYTELLER 2

Or like Joseph and Nicodemus, would you prefer to hide until it's too late . . .

STORYTELLER 1

. . . And live like Jesus stayed dead?

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After the Rooster

(John 21)

By George Halitzka

STORYTELLER 1

Simon was always called Peter; the Rock.

STORYTELLER 2

But depending on the day, that could either refer to his strength in building the church . . .

STORYTELLER 3

. . . or the contents of his head.

STORYTELLER 1

In the Upper Room, Peter said,

STORYTELLER 3

"Jesus, I don't care if everybody else runs away. *I'm* your friend for life. In fact, I'll even die with you, if that's what it takes!"

STORYTELLER 2

Later that night, in a turnaround that would make a Chicago politician blush with pride, Peter denied Jesus three times, then made some poor rooster live in infamy for crowing too much.

STORYTELLER 1

After that, he promptly joined the other disciples in playing hide-and-seek from whoever was out to get them.

STORYTELLER 3

Peter was not a "teacher's pet" kind of apostle.

STORYTELLER 2

But wouldn't you think he might change his tune after the resurrection? After all, Peter saw Jesus alive and kickin' twice, not to mention witnessing the empty tomb!

STORYTELLER 3

Well . . . not quite. A few days later, what do we find Peter doing [in John 21]?

STORYTELLER 1

Fishing.

STORYTELLER 2

Not for men. For fish.

STORYTELLER 3

I can't say for certain, but I suspect that Peter was still beating himself up for denying His savior.

STORYTELLER 1

He didn't think God could possibly restore him to his old occupation of fishing for men. So he figured,

STORYTELLER 3

"Well, back to the daily grind . . . better patch up the ol' nets and head for the lake!"

STORYTELLER 2

But that's not the way Jesus works.

STORYTELLER 3

Peter forgot the lesson about footwashing that Jesus had just taught him a few days before, in the Upper Room.

STORYTELLER 1

See, on a daily basis, no matter how long I've known Jesus, no matter how "spiritual" I'm feeling, I'm going to blow it.

STORYTELLER 2

Possibly before tomorrow, I'll catch myself being a prideful ball of selfishness.

STORYTELLER 3

In the morning, I may choose to enjoy the ministry of the comforter (the one on my bed) instead of spending Quality Time with my Maker.

STORYTELLER 1

So what business do I have calling myself a Jesus-follower?

STORYTELLER 2

How dare I think that the day after I blow it, I can come back to God and talk to Him like nothing ever happened?

STORYTELLER 3

It's because Jesus died once and for all.

STORYTELLER 1

I'm already a Christian; I'm already clean.

STORYTELLER 2

All I need is a little foot-washing--daily coming into God's presence, admitting what I did wrong, and trying to turn it around.

STORYTELLER 3

But sometimes, I fall into the same trap that Peter did when he went back to fishing.

STORYTELLER 1

If I commit a little sin, I might as well go on and commit some others while I'm at it, because I'm clearly a failure.

STORYTELLER 2

If I skip a day (or two or three or four) of prayer, I might as well give it up.

STORYTELLER 3

It's no good to jump back on the straight and narrow after I've detoured down the wide road.

STORYTELLER 1

But that's not the way Jesus works.

STORYTELLER 2

Here's the best definition I ever heard of repentance: "To turn 180 degrees and go God's way."

STORYTELLER 3

In God's economy, the key question is not, "What did I do?"

STORYTELLER 1

It's "What am I going to do about it?"

STORYTELLER 2

Will I give it all up and go back to fishing?

STORYTELLER 3

Or will I do my "Daily 180," allowing Jesus to wash my feet, and then move on?

STORYTELLER 1

If ol' Rocky could get restored to ministry and friendship after he denied his Savior . . . maybe I can, too.

STORYTELLER 2

It doesn't matter what I did an hour ago. In this moment, as Jesus washes my feet--

STORYTELLER 3

Restores me to full friendship with Him--

STORYTELLER 1

His words to me are the same ones He spoke to Peter.

STORYTELLER 2

They are simple and few:

STORYTELLER 3

"Follow me."

(END)

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Betrayal and Love (John 13)

By George Halitzka

(Two NARRATORS stand together by a lecturn, off to one side of the stage. They read from the script. Center, JESUS, PETER, and JUDAS, in street clothes, stand with their heads lowered and backs to the audience. As they enact their roles, they step forward and speak their memorized lines to each other. JESUS carries a basin and towel.)

NARRATOR 1

It wasn't exactly the moment of decision, the political maneuvering was underway.

NARRATOR 2

But perhaps it was the straw that broke the camel's back.

NARRATOR 1

Dinner was in progress, bellies were getting full, and this, our friend decided, was put up or shut up time.

NARRATOR 2

Tonight, the Boss better talk about the hostile-takeover plans that were going to make three years of hard work pay off, or he was a dead man.

NARRATOR 1

Either something practical came out of this nonsense about beggars and hospital cases, or the assassination moved full speed ahead.

NARRATOR 2

And then the Boss made the move that, in our friend's mind, sealed his fate.

NARRATOR 1

He stood up--

NARRATOR 2

--took off his suit coat--

NARRATOR 1

--picked up a basin--

NARRATOR 2

--and started washing feet.

(Pause. JESUS, PETER, and JUDAS turn around; PETER and JUDAS sit down on stools. JESUS ties the towel around his waist, walks over to PETER, and kneels at his feet.)

NARRATOR 1

Jesus went to Peter first, the man who wanted to be Top Dog in the Kingdom of Heaven; the guy who needed a foot washing worse than anybody else--mainly because he was always shoving his size tens in his mouth.

NARRATOR 2

Here was the guy who in a few hours, would claim he never met his Best Friend. At least he had a little shame:

PETER

Lord, are you going to wash *my* feet?

JESUS

(shaking his head; smiling)

You don't get it yet, Peter. But later on--

NARRATOR 2

--about the same time a rooster crows three times--

JESUS

You'll understand.

PETER

(drawing away from JESUS)

You will never wash my feet!

JESUS

If I don't wash you, you don't belong to me.

PETER

Well, then don't just wash my feet! Wash my hands and my head, too!

JESUS

(laughing gently)

Peter, I cleaned you up when you believed. You just need a little road dust rinsed off.

(looking at JUDAS, with sorrow and pity)

All of you, except one, have been cleaned.

(JESUS kneels at the feet of JUDAS and begins to wash his feet.)

NARRATOR 1

Then Jesus bent down at the feet of Judas; the man who was only in it for himself; who skimmed money off the funds that could have been given to the poor; who was waiting for this "Kingdom of Heaven" thing that would finally throw the Romans out and elevate Judas to his cushy government job.

NARRATOR 2

Judas, who was so disillusioned by the upside-down Kingdom that he was about to walk out the door and sell his Boss down the river for 40 bucks.

NARRATOR 1

Jesus knelt by his calloused soles, dipped them in clean water, and tried to rub away the filth of three years of pounding the Judean pavement in sandals. Some road dust; a rancid scrap of waste from the gutter; camel dung.

NARRATOR 2

Jesus took the foot of the betrayer and lovingly cradled it in his arms; gently applied the towel wrapped around his waist. But Judas' thoughts ran cold:

JUDAS

The fool! He has no idea what I've devised while he washes my feet as a slave.

NARRATOR 1

It's no accident that a few minutes later, Judas left the room to seal God's fate with a kiss.

NARRATOR 2

Betrayal and love have never understood each other.

(JESUS stands up between PETER and JUDAS and removes the towel from his waist.)

NARRATOR 1

Jesus finished washing the feet of prideful, lustful, greedy, unwise, capricious men; twelve in all.

NARRATOR 2

He finished the work normally relegated to the lowest slave in the house. Then he looked Peter in the eye.

JESUS

Do you understand what I've done? If I, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you should wash each others' feet. Slaves are not superior to their owners, or messengers to the people who send them. You are blessed whenever you follow my example.

(JESUS lays the basin and towel aside.)

NARRATOR 1

It's amazing, isn't it? How two different people can have the same experience and interpret it in completely different ways?

NARRATOR 2

Oh, Peter didn't walk out the door and become a "teacher's pet" kind of apostle.

NARRATOR 1

But after he denied his Savior, he remembered Jesus' sign of love. He knew that anybody who'd wash the feet of scum like him would also take him back.

(PETER kneels at JESUS' feet, asking forgiveness.)

NARRATOR 2

He went on to become the rock of the church; a servant so devoted that he washed thousands of their sins.

NARRATOR 1

When the executioners came for him, he asked to be crucified upside-down, because he wasn't even worthy to imitate the Savior in death.

NARRATOR 2

Judas started to feel uneasy as soon as he realized that Jesus knew what he knew.

NARRATOR 1

The betrayer missed the point; for him, foot-washing sealed Jesus' fate. Slave work was not his spiritual gift.

(JUDAS exits the stage uneasily.)

NARRATOR 2

He walked into the night and only looked back when the deed was done; when the only way out seemed to be a strong branch and a noose.

NARRATOR 1

But then, betrayal and love have never understood each other.

NARRATOR 2

Just after the traitor left with clean feet and a heart of filth, the Lord said--

JESUS

(to PETER, who is still kneeling)

Love each other in the same way I have loved you. Everyone will know that you are my disciples because of your love for one another.

NARRATOR 1

The basin and towel were still lying by the door, giving mute testimony.

NARRATOR 2

Peter and Judas just interpreted them a little differently.

(Blackout.)

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Paradise

By George Halitzka

PART I

When Joseph was eight years old, the soldiers came into his village and destroyed life as he knew it. There had been an attempt on the governor's life, and the soldiers were ordered to kill twenty men in retaliation, but Joseph didn't know that. What he did know--and learned in an instant--was that his father was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and that people have a lot of blood in them.

Joseph rushed to his father's body, before the killer had even walked away. He remembered staring into that soldier's eyes in disbelief and seeing steel staring back. From that moment on, he hated all men of that kind.

For some reason, his mother never took him to the synagogue anymore.

When Joseph was twelve, he and his mother moved to the capital--there was supposed to be more opportunity there. But things became so bad that his mother was reduced to selling her body on the streets. Her customers were often soldiers--the same kind that had killed Joseph's father. His hatred for them grew and festered.

Then one day, Joseph met a group of young men who were dedicated to overthrowing the occupying government. He eagerly joined them and went on his first "mission" less than a month later. He personally killed two soldiers. Finally, he felt that his father's death was avenged.

When he arrived home, however--after being gone for more than a week--his mother began to ask questions. The whole story spilled out, even the part about the killings. She urged him to stop seeking revenge and forgive the soldiers for what they did to his father!

She had started listening to the teachings of a strange street preacher while he was gone. He talked about loving your adversaries and praying for your abusers. Joseph told her it was ridiculous. She cried. He went back to his friends.

Each time he went on a mission, Joseph killed at least one soldier. But each time he went home, his mother begged him to let go of his bitterness and follow the teachings of this strange street preacher. Meanwhile, the soldiers were looking for him everywhere.

One day when he went home to his mother's dingy apartment, he saw her lying in a corner. He ran to her side, gaping at her bruises from a severe beating. He shouted, "Who did this to you?" His mother only whispered, "Forgive them," as a dozen soldiers stepped out and encircled him.

He hurled himself at the nearest soldier, but they subdued him before he'd even killed one. The governor pronounced the obligatory death sentence for high treason and murder.

PART II

Joseph was led out the next day to be crucified. That was how the Romans executed people in those days. He would be nailed to a cross and left to die from slow blood loss, exposure, and asphyxiation.

Two other men were to be executed the same day. One was a weeping coward. But the man in front--his name was Jesus--acted very strangely. He wasn't like a criminal--He was silent instead of shouting curses. And people along the road started crying when he passed. Who mourned the death of a traitor or a murderer?

Suddenly, Joseph saw a woman pushing her way through the crowd. "My Son!" she called. This must be Jesus' mother! As they walked further, a man called out, "You are the Son of God!" Another shouted, "You're killing an innocent man!"

The Son of God? The street preacher Joseph's mother had been listening to claimed to be the Son of God! But why were they killing Him; she said He'd never done anything wrong . . . was this the same Man?

They had reached the place of execution. The soldiers stripped off Joseph's clothes, threw him to the ground on top of a rough wooden crossbeam, and drove two nails into his wrists. Pain ripped through his arms as they hoisted the crossbar, with his body attached, on top of an upright post in the ground. Joseph

cursed in agony. Jesus looked towards heaven and cried, "Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing!"

Forgiveness. There it was again--the idea of letting go of hate and bitterness rather than seeking vengeance. And it was coming from--if his mother was right--the Son of God?

He heard the man on the other cross insulting Jesus; asking why, if He was the Son of God, He didn't come down from His cross? Joseph hollered back hoarsely, "Don't you fear God?" The other man laughed. Joseph drew an agonizing breath and went on. "We're getting what we deserve! But this Man hasn't done anything wrong!" He paused for a moment to gather his strength. "Jesus," Joseph cried, "Remember me! Remember me when you get to your Kingdom!"

Jesus writhed in pain as he turned his head to look at Joseph. He said, "Today, you will be with me in Paradise."

That night, after the Son of God had sent His spirit back to the Father, the two thieves also died. But one was forgiven. And Jesus embraced him as he walked through the gates of heaven.

(END)

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