

SIX LIVES - SIX STORIES

by Michael W. Massa



CHRISTIANPUBLISHERS

Copyright Notice

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this Work is subject to a royalty. This Work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

RIGHTS RESERVED: All rights to this Work are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights. Also reserved are: motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, information and storage retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

PERFORMANCE RIGHTS AND ROYALTY PAYMENTS: All amateur and stock performance rights to this Work are controlled exclusively by Christian Publishers. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this play without securing license and royalty arrangements in advance from Christian Publishers. Questions concerning other rights should be addressed to Christian Publishers. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Professional and stock fees will be set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. Any licensing requests and inquiries relating to amateur and stock (professional) performance rights should be addressed to Christian Publishers.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid, whether the play is presented for charity or profit and whether or not admission is charged.

AUTHOR CREDIT: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this play must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this play. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line where no other written matter appears. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the play. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s).

PUBLISHER CREDIT: Whenever this play is produced, all programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice: ***Produced by special arrangement with Christian Publishers.***

COPYING: Any unauthorized copying of this Work or excerpts from this Work is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this Work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Christian Publishers.

Six Lives- Six Stories

**Six dramatic monolog sermons
for Lenten presentations**

by MICHAEL W. MASSA

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Judas, The Disciple Who Betrayed
Caiaphas, The Priest Who Complied
Peter, The Disciple Who Denied
Pilate, The Politician Who Controlled
Centurion, The Soldier Who Proclaimed
Dismas, The Thief Who Believed

Introduction

Overview:

This series of dramatic monolog Lenten sermons is designed for maximum flexibility. If this is the first time that you have ever attempted dramatic monolog, you need not worry. There are detailed directions, including suggestions for making the “Identifying Objects” that add to the presentation.

The “Identifying Object” is used to create the character that you portray and to help differentiate between that portrayed character and yourself as worship leader, without the necessity of costume or make-up.

If you are an old hand at dramatic monolog, however, and wish to use full costume or make-up, you will find these monologs very adaptable to that approach also.

Each sermon is written with an optional children’s sermon introduction that prepares the small ones in your congregation for the presentation to follow. It is best that the children come forward for this. If you are presenting the sermon in costume, it is best that someone else speak with the children.

The same identifying object is used in the children’s talk as is used in the monolog so that the young ones, as well as the adults, will readily accept the presentation as from the character portrayed.

Format:

Each of the monologs of this packet is in four parts.

1. Children’s Introduction
2. Chancel or Pulpit Introduction
3. Main Body of Sermon
4. Identifying Object Construction Hints

Characterization:

The six sermons are written from six different points of view. Each character has its identifying traits, from the shrewd politician, Pilate, who worried about his control over the city, to the thief, Dismas, who found that the Son of God would forgive his sins.

Through their eyes comes a proclamation of the Jesus who

was real in their lives. This is a real testimony of real men. For the proclamation to become real to the congregation, the characters must be real. They must be real personalities.

This realism is not difficult to achieve. Read all six sermons in advance. Form your own opinion of what each of the characters was like. Picture that character in your mind. If there is someone of whom the character reminds you, envision that person. Visualize how that person would speak the words, what gestures he would use, how he would stand, and how he would walk. Then, as you deliver the sermon, try to be that person.

Presentation:

These sermons are primarily intended for presentation as a chancel address from the floor of the chancel area. They will work quite well from the pulpit, but there is a greatly reduced feeling of conversation with the character.

The identifying object is introduced and explained during the children's talk. It is then placed where it is visible to the congregation, perhaps on the edge of the lectern or pulpit. After the chancel introduction, the object is picked up to symbolize that you are "becoming" the character of the message.

After the sermon, the object is returned to its visible position where its presence encourages the congregation to extend and internalize their thoughts concerning the witness they have just heard. This is especially effective if an appropriate hymn immediately follows the sermon.

If you are both leading the worship and presenting the sermon, it is advisable that you have a hymn immediately following the sermon. If you have tried to "be" the character that you are portraying, you will find that you may need a moment or two to compose yourself and once again be "you" before the continuation of the liturgy.

Judas, The Disciple Who Betrayed

Identifying Object: Thirty pieces of silver in a cloth bag

CHILDREN'S INTRODUCTION:

(Have bag of silver in hand.) Boys and girls, tonight I want to talk to you just a little bit about thirty pieces of silver and betrayal. One of Jesus' disciples, one of the twelve apostles, was the man who betrayed him. This man told the Roman soldiers and the Jewish temple guards where they could find Jesus when there were no large crowds around to protect him. He led the soldiers there and even identified Jesus for them by greeting him with a kiss on the cheek. The man who betrayed Jesus with a kiss was named Judas Iscariot.

In reward for betraying Jesus, this disciple was given thirty pieces of silver. *(Pour silver into hand and then back into bag.)* That was a lot of money then. That was a month's wages for a man who worked in the fields. It was for a month's wages that Judas betrayed our Lord.

Ever since that time, the name "Judas" has come to mean "traitor." And the symbol of a traitor is thirty pieces of silver.

Let's say a little prayer. Dear Lord, give us your strength so that we may never betray your love. Keep us ever close to you as our Lord. *(Place bag in visible position as the children return to their seats.)*

CHANCEL INTRODUCTION:

Grace, mercy and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, who is the Christ. *(Point or gesture to the bag of silver.)*

Thirty pieces of silver — the emblem of betrayal — the symbol of a traitor — the mark of Judas. When I pick up that bag of silver this evening, for a few moments I will become

Judas Iscariot. And we will hear his story. (*Pause, then pick up bag.*)

MAIN BODY OF SERMON:

I am Judas of Kerioth. I know what you are thinking. Before I say anything else, I want to make it clear that it wasn't for the money. Yes. Yes! I betrayed him. But it wasn't for the money. The reasons that I betrayed him are hard to understand. No one ever understands. I never understood. I think that is why I betrayed him. I never really understood him.

Perhaps my lack of understanding came from the fact that I was always an outsider. I was the only one in our little band who was not from Galilee. Such simple faith these Galileans had. I called him teacher. They called him Lord.

Why Jesus chose me to be the treasurer of that band, I'll never know. Maybe it was because none of them really knew the value of money. Jesus would say, "Don't worry about tomorrow." But I was the one who had to dig into the bag to pay the bills. There was always enough. Even the once, or the few times, that I could no longer stand the wandering and living like vagabonds and took a little of the money for myself — even then, there was always enough for the expenses of the group and to give alms to the poor. While Jesus was with us there was always enough . . . of everything.

I remember once when a large crowd had followed us out into the middle of nowhere. It was getting late and none of us had eaten. We went to him and asked him to send them away so that they could go to find food. He just looked at us. Oh, how Jesus could look at a man. He looked at us and said, "You feed them." We asked, "Are we to go and try to buy bread for such a large crowd?"

He answered, "What have you here?"

There were only six or seven loaves of bread and a couple

1 of little fish. That didn't bother Jesus. He blessed the bread
2 as if it were a feast and broke it and gave it to us to distribute.
3 There were thousands of people there that day, and yet it was
4 enough. We even collected seven baskets of scraps from that
5 one meal. I don't know how he did it. Jesus had power that
6 was beyond anything that I had even seen.

7 It wasn't just with food either. I saw him walk up to a
8 withered cripple and say, "Arise and walk!", and the man got
9 up and walked home. I saw him heal the sick. I saw him cleanse
10 lepers. I was with him when he cried out, "Lazarus, come
11 forth!", and a man who had been dead walked forth from his
12 own tomb.

13 Jesus had power. That's what made it so frustrating. He
14 had power that was unbelievable and he wouldn't use it for
15 what we wanted most. He kept talking about the Kingdom of
16 God and freedom. Yet he would never move against the
17 Romans. He could have had an army of followers — each one
18 willing to fight to the death to set up his kingdom, but he
19 would not.

20 The closest that he ever came to insurrection was the
21 day that he drove the money changers from the temple. That
22 upset the Sadducees, but I think that the Romans just ignored
23 it. The Romans had always thought it was strange that we
24 Jews would allow someone to obviously cheat us out of large
25 sums of money just so we could make money offerings in the
26 temple without using coins that bore a human image.

27 Once! Once I really thought that he was going to do
28 something. He sent a couple of men into town to borrow a
29 white donkey and he rode into Jerusalem in triumph. Oh, how
30 the people shouted and cried out, "Hosanna! Hosanna!
31 Salvation now!"

32 Had Jesus but snapped his fingers, the whole city would
33 have risen against Rome. But he did not. He walked across
34 the palm branches that they had spread in his path and he
35 entered the temple to pray. They welcomed him as a king, and

1 he ignored them.

2 Such a waste of opportunity. Such a waste of power. I
3 never could stand waste. I think it was the wasting of the
4 ointment that finally made it clear to me that I had to act.

5 We were in Bethany. A woman came into the house where
6 we were dining and broke open an expensive flask of burial
7 ointment. It could have been sold for a year's wages, and she
8 poured it over his head like common perfume. We were all
9 aghast. Then Jesus said that she was anointing him for death.

10 That's when I realized that he would waste his power
11 like she had wasted the ointment. He would allow himself to
12 be anointed for death, but he would never be anointed king.

13 That's when I betrayed him. I knew that once the Romans
14 began to really pressure him, he would fight back. He would
15 be forced to use the power that I knew he had.

16 I went to the council of priests, the Sanhedrin. We knew
17 that they had been looking for a way to find Jesus when the
18 crowds weren't around to protect him.

19 The thirty pieces of silver, a month's wages, were proof
20 that I took the blood of the man I betrayed upon my own head.
21 I wasn't worried. There was no blood guilt to worry about. I
22 knew the power of Jesus. I knew he would fight at last. I knew
23 he would be forced to use his power to lead Judah to freedom.

24 How wrong I was.

25 When they came for him in the garden, he made Peter
26 put away his sword. He even healed the man Peter had struck.
27 Jesus went with him that night like . . . like a lamb to sacrifice.
28 He just looked at them and let them lead him away.

29 The Sanhedrin tried him that night and condemned him
30 to death. He just looked at them. They took him before Pilate.
31 He could have struck them all down with just one word. I
32 know it! Instead he just looked at them. They beat him. They
33 scourged him. They spit upon him. He just looked at them.
34 They put a crown of thorns upon his head and a purple robe
35 upon his back and called him, "King of the Jews." Then they

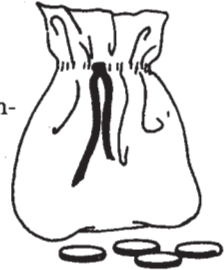
ordered him crucified. That's when he looked at me. Here was the king I tried to create. I knew then that he was going to die. I knew then that he was going to let them kill him. The blood guilt that I had so gladly accepted came raining down upon my head.

I ran back to the priests. I threw their money in their faces, but it made no difference. I knew that I had betrayed an innocent man and he was going to die. His blood was on my head. I could not stand that guilt. I took the curse I had put on him upon myself also. I went far out of the city and I hanged myself. I never did understand him. If I had just waited, I might have understood. When they hung him on the cross, he looked down at them and then cried out to heaven, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

Had I but heard those words, maybe I would have understood all of the power that was within him. It wasn't the power to conquer the world. It was the power to forgive the sins of the world. I wanted Judah for Judeans. Jesus wanted the world for God. I never understood him. *(After a pause, set money bag back in its place. An appropriate hymn should follow.)*

IDENTIFYING OBJECT:

The identifying object for Judas is a bag containing 30 pieces of silver. One way to obtain 30 pieces of silver is to purchase facsimiles of the denarius from a Christian supply house. A much cheaper and yet sufficient method is to use 30 dimes. The bag should be small enough to hold comfortably in the hand, but large enough to allow the dimes to rattle when the bag is shaken. It is possible to make an appropriate bag out of scrap felt, but there are many places that a good bag may be borrowed. Fine jewelry or silver is often kept in a soft protector bag. If such a bag could be borrowed for a few hours, it would be ideal.



Caiaphas, The Priest Who Complied

Identifying Object: The Breastplate of the High Priest

CHILDREN'S INTRODUCTION:

(Have breastplate in hand.)

Boys and girls, this is called a breastplate. This one is sort of like the one that the High Priest Caiaphas wore. His was a lot more elaborate and had real gold thread and jewels and a golden chain to hold it in place, but it was a lot like this one.

The breastplate that Caiaphas wore was supposed to be a symbol that he served God in the temple and that he led the people in the worship of God. For some of the High Priests long before Caiaphas, that was true, but Caiaphas was more interested in earthly power than in glorifying God. He was not a good High Priest.

Caiaphas wanted to kill Jesus. He was the man that first condemned Jesus to death. Caiaphas wasn't a good priest of God. Let's say a little prayer. Dear Lord, help us always to remember that we are called upon to worship God, not to glorify ourselves. Amen. *(Place breastplate in visible position as children return to their seats.)*

CHANCEL INTRODUCTION:

Grace, mercy and peace from God, our Father and from Our Lord and Savior, Jesus, who is the Christ. *(Point or gesture toward the breastplate.)*

The breastplate of Aaron — the symbol of the High Priesthood — symbol of dedication and worship of God. But a symbol that was corrupted by High Priests such as Caiaphas who put personal gain above their duty to God and personal glorification above the worship of God. This evening, when I

1 put on the breastplate, for a few moments I will become
2 Caiaphas. And we will hear his story. *(Pause, then put on*
3 *breastplate.)*

4
5 **MAIN BODY OF SERMON:**
6

7 I am the High Priest Caiaphas. The Roman Governor,
8 Valerius Gratus, appointed me High Priest for all Israel. My
9 father-in-law, Annas, was High Priest before me. He didn't
10 know how to compromise. He couldn't comply with the Roman
11 requests. So he was removed from office.

12 Our laws said that a High Priest was High Priest until
13 his death, but when one lives under Roman rule, one must
14 compromise with Roman law.

15 I compromised. I was High Priest, and yet I was not High
16 Priest. The Romans said that I was High Priest, and so I was.
17 But some of the more strict followers of God's law said that
18 Annas was still the High Priest.

19 I could wait. Annas was old and I was not. I knew that
20 one day the High Priesthood would be mine alone. For the
21 time being, I had most of the power and wealth and prestige
22 of the office. I could wait. I could compromise.

23 I could even defer to Annas when it was expedient, like
24 the time that we had so much trouble with this Jesus of
25 Nazareth. I didn't mind that Jesus was taken to Annas first.
26 I helped arrange it. After the old man was satisfied that we
27 should continue, I proceeded officially. There was no interference
28 from him or his cronies. They had already spoken. Things are
29 so much easier when you know how to compromise.

30 Jesus presented us with three problems. Actually, there
31 was but one problem, but you might say that there were three
32 aspects to that problem. In the first place, Jesus claimed, or
33 at least it was said of him, that he was the expected Messiah.
34 He was, however, from Nazareth. A Messiah from Galilee? We
35 all knew that was absurd.

1 However, the second aspect of the problem was that the
2 people were beginning to believe in him. With his miracles
3 and his cures, he was gaining greater power and authority
4 than the rabbis, than the priests, or even I myself.

5 That was aggravating, but it was tolerable. I had endured
6 worse. After all, I was able to compromise when necessary.
7 But the third aspect of the problem, the real problem itself,
8 was that I could see that eventually the Romans would become
9 upset. Eventually, they would tolerate him no more.

10 If he continued to raise the hopes of the people for a
11 Messiah, eventually Rome would be forced to crush him. I
12 knew that if that occurred, Rome would not stop with just
13 him. If the people rose in revolt, then Rome would turn on us
14 and crush all of Judea because of this one man.

15 Even if the country were spared, I would not be. Like
16 Annas before me, I would be turned out of my office as unable
17 to help maintain peace among the populace. For the sake of
18 my office, I mean, for the sake of the nation, it was necessary
19 that Jesus be cut down before he could do further damage.

20 We found a traitor among his band. That surprised me.
21 Actually, it was ironic. We acted because we felt Jesus had
22 done too much. Judas betrayed him because he felt that Jesus
23 had done too little. What a strange compromise was struck
24 for thirty pieces of silver. We captured Jesus in the Garden
25 of Gethsemane. First he was taken to the house of my father-in-
26 law where Annas questioned him for some time. Then he was
27 brought before the Sanhedrin where he was tried that night.
28 Oh, I know that was a little irregular, but when the fate of
29 the entire world is at stake, one must compromise. Besides,
30 we couldn't give the rabble time to realize what was occurring.

31 We heard several witnesses that night, but no two could
32 accuse Jesus of a specific capital crime. The trial was not
33 going well. I knew that the only way that I could convince the
34 Sanhedrin to vote for death was for Jesus to condemn himself
35 before their very eyes.

1 I knew it was possible. I was aware of something that
2 many of the Sanhedrin did not know. They knew, or had heard
3 it said, that Jesus claimed to be the Anointed One. They
4 assumed that he was saying that God had chosen him to lead
5 the people of Judah to freedom. To refute that, I would have
6 to claim to know the mind of God. But I knew that Jesus
7 claimed more than that. I knew that Jesus claimed to be the
8 Son of the Most Blessed. I confronted him with that. I called
9 upon him in the name of the living God to tell us plainly if he
10 were the Messiah, the Son of God. He had to know that his
11 answer would condemn him, yet he looked at us peacefully
12 and replied, "As you say I am."

13 After all that work and worry, it was so easy. I tore my
14 robe to mark the blasphemy and before the council could
15 recover from its shock, I cried out, "What need we of
16 witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy." They condemned
17 him to die, as I knew they would. Now it was only a matter of
18 getting the Romans to carry out the execution.

19 Technically, we could have executed him ourselves. It
20 was allowed in the case of certain religious crimes. But that
21 would have been a lot of trouble. We would have needed
22 Roman permission. Then, we would have had to follow exactly
23 the proper procedures. We would have had to try Jesus in the
24 daytime. We would have had to try him twice — and on
25 separate days. We would have had to come to an agreement
26 about whether Annas or I or both of us should preside over
27 the trial.

28 All of that would have taken too long. That would allow
29 Jesus' followers time to gather. It was too risky. Besides, I
30 knew that I had opposition among my own priests. Joseph of
31 Arimathea looked directly into my eyes as he voted to
32 condemn Jesus. He knew as well as I that a unanimous verdict
33 of death could not be carried out. If no one had any doubt
34 that the person should die, then in the eyes of the law, not
35 enough had been done in their defense. I couldn't afford

1 another trial. Men like Joseph could undermine everything
2 that I had accomplished. No, the execution had to be by the
3 decree of Pilate.

4 Pontius Pilate was a slippery one. He weaseled this way
5 and then that way, but was persistent, and in the end he gave
6 the order for crucifixion.

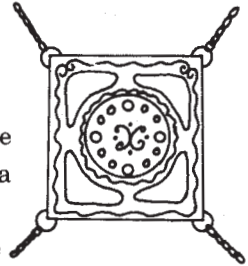
7 I thought the death of Jesus would be the end of my
8 problems. I was wrong. He was more trouble to me dead than
9 he ever was alive. His followers said that he came back from
10 the tomb. I had anticipated that. I had convinced Pilate to
11 guard the tomb. No one could have gotten past the Roman
12 guards to steal the body; yet on the morning following the
13 Sabbath, the tomb was empty.

14 Maybe he did arise. Maybe he was the Son of God. I don't
15 know. I do know that despite all my compromise and
16 compliance, three years later Vitellius, Legate of Syria, officer
17 of Rome, had me removed from office.

18 I lived to see the destruction of the temple and the fall
19 of the city. All that I had fought and compromised to save was
20 gone before my children's children were married. Yet two
21 thousand years later, that which I sought to destroy, lives on.
22 I can't explain it. I can't explain it unless — unless Jesus is
23 the Messiah — unless he is truly the Son of God. *(Pause, then*
24 *remove the breastplate and place it in its visible position. An*
25 *appropriate hymn should follow.)*

27 IDENTIFYING OBJECT:

28
29 The identifying object of Caiaphas is the
30 breastplate of the High Priest. This breastplate
31 is described in Exodus 28:15-30. It was evidently a
32 highly decorated bag about 9 inches square
33 that contained the Urim and Thummin. There
34 were twelve precious stones on the exterior of the breastplate and it
35 was bound to the ceremonial ephod of the High Priest by golden chains



1 that passed through gold rings at its corners. The colors gold, purple
2 and scarlet are mentioned, but there seems to be no total scholarly
3 consensus as to the color of the cloth.

4 A quite good representation of the breastplate can be made with
5 a piece of poster board, some cloth, twelve shank buttons, some colored
6 aluminum foil and a piece of yellow yarn. Shank buttons are the ones
7 with the little piece on the back to put the thread through. If there
8 isn't any colored foil around, regular foil can be colored with a felt
9 tip marker.

10 The twelve buttons are covered with foil to make them appear to
11 be jewels. The foil can be shaped as it is applied so that the "jewel"
12 is the correct shape. A 9" by 9" square of poster board is covered with
13 a scrap of "royal-looking cloth" and then the jewels are mounted. The
14 yellow yarn is used as a "chain" that goes around the neck. The
15 length of the "chain" should be adjusted so that the breastplate hangs
16 in the middle of Caiaphas' chest.

17 If you wish to get a little bit more fancy with the breastplate,
18 a few additions can add dramatically to its appearance. Padding
19 between the cloth and the cardboard gives a look of fullness. Yellow
20 thread sewn between the jewels adds to the richness. A costume
21 jewelry chain in place of the yellow yarn reflects light, as would real
22 golden chain. Some "golden" liquid embroidery markers can be used
23 to highlight the cloth. Any of these and more can be used to make
24 the representation of the breastplate of the High Priest even more
25 real.

Peter, The Disciple Who Denied

Identifying Object: A fishing net

CHILDREN'S INTRODUCTION:

(Have net in hand.)

Boys and girls, tonight I want to talk to you a little about Simon Peter. He was a fisherman, but he didn't use a fishing pole and a hook. He had a net that he would toss out into the water and then drag back in, hopefully full of fish. One day while Peter and his brother, Andrew, were casting their nets, Jesus came up to them and said, "Follow me." They went with Jesus and became his disciples.

Peter was the leader of the Apostles after Jesus was crucified, but on the night that Jesus was captured, Peter denied that he even knew Jesus. Peter was sorry for this later, and Jesus forgave him, but Peter could never forget that he had denied Jesus.

Let's say a little prayer. Dear Lord, give us the strength that we may never deny you, but will always gladly proclaim your name to all the world. Amen. *(Place net in visible position as the children return to their seats.)*

CHANCEL INTRODUCTION:

Grace, mercy and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, who is the Christ. *(Point or gesture toward the net.)*

The net of a fisherman. Peter was a fisherman. He and his brothers would toil on the waters each day to bring in the harvest of the seas. One day Jesus called Peter away from his nets and made him a fisher of men. But Peter never forgot the sea. Peter also never forgot the day that he denied his Lord. When I pick up the net of the fisherman, for a few moments I

1 will become Simon Peter, and we will hear his story. (*Pause,*
2 *then pick up net.*)

3
4 **MAIN BODY OF SERMON:**

5
6 I am just a simple fisherman. My father called me Simon,
7 the wanderer. Jesus called me Peter, the rock. My Lord
8 proclaimed me a foundation stone. I wasn't a rock. A house
9 built on such a foundation would crumble in the lightest
10 breeze of spring. I was sand. I denied him.

11 Many things led up to that night of denial. The story
12 actually begins before I ever met Jesus. My brother Andrew
13 and I had left Bethsaida before — to follow John, the one they
14 called the Baptizer. John said that he was preparing the way
15 for the Messiah. He filled our hearts with joy and expectation.
16 Then one day, he was gone. He had spoken out too loudly
17 against Herod and he was dead.

18 We went back to our nets, my brother and I. Our father,
19 Jonah, welcomed our return. Then one day as we cast our
20 nets from the shore, Jesus of Nazareth came and stood behind
21 us. He said simply, "Follow me." I knew immediately that he
22 was the one. It wasn't something that I knew in my head. It
23 was something that I felt in my heart. We followed him.

24 Andrew and I were with him for three years. Often I
25 would not understand the long arguments that Jesus would
26 have with the Pharisees or the detailed discussions of the Law
27 that he had with the Scribes, but I didn't need to understand
28 those things to believe in him. I was there when he healed
29 people. I saw what he could do for the sick and the lame and
30 the blind. I didn't need to be a scholar to know in my heart
31 that Jesus was the Messiah.

32 Once, when we were walking near Caesarea Phillipi, the
33 crowds were not close around us for a change. Jesus asked
34 us, "Who do people say that I am?" One of us said, "Elijah."
35 Another said, "Jeremiah." Still another said, "John the Baptist

1 returned." Jesus thought for a moment. Then he stopped and
2 turned to us and asked, "Who do you say that I am?"

3 He was looking directly at me. I told him what was in
4 my heart. I said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living
5 God." That's when he blessed me and called me "Peter."

6 Once again I was filled with joy. This time it would be
7 different. Then he began talking about how he had to die. I
8 cried out, "No, this must never be!"

9 Suddenly Jesus was angry. He said that I was the bearer
10 of temptation. He said that I was working against God. I was
11 so confused. I guess I said the wrong thing. I often said the
12 wrong thing. I would open my mouth and my words would
13 come tumbling out. They would seem so right when I said
14 them and so wrong when I remembered them.

15 I often wish I could forget what I remember and
16 remember what I have forgotten. Jesus said so much that I
17 didn't understand. None of us really understood until
18 afterwards. Then we tried to remember exactly what Jesus
19 had said.

20 Some things are hard to remember. Some things are hard
21 to forget. I will never — I can never forget that last night.
22 Another disciple and I were sent into town to arrange a room
23 where we could celebrate the Passover together. We all
24 gathered there that night. Jesus should have acted as the head
25 of our family for the Passover, but instead he first acted as
26 the lowest of slaves and washed our feet. I objected, but he
27 said that it was necessary, so I agreed. During the meal he
28 said that one of us would betray him. I think somehow he told
29 John who it would be. Had I known who it was who would do
30 this, I would have torn him limb from limb. Maybe it is better
31 that I didn't know. After all, what is worse, to betray or to
32 deny?

33 Jesus used a special blessing of the bread and the wine
34 that night. As he broke the bread, he said, "Take, eat, this is
35 my body." And as he blessed the cup he said, "This is my blood

1 of the new covenant which is poured out for many.” We didn’t
2 understand that night. The understanding came later — much
3 later.

4 But Jesus knew. Jesus knew what was to come. He knew
5 who would betray him. He knew who would deny him. He said
6 that each of us would fall away from him that night. I boasted
7 that I would follow him to the very gates of death. Then his
8 eyes had that look they often had when I had said something
9 wrong. He answered me by saying that I would deny him three
10 times before the trumpet sounded the end of the night watch.

11 Had I denied him but once, it would have been no less
12 than denying him three times. In the garden where he prayed,
13 I fought for him. In the courtyard of the High Priest, I denied
14 him. The third time I swore with an oath that I did not even
15 know him. No sooner had the words left my mouth than the
16 trumpet called the end of the night watch. From outside the
17 city walls I could hear the crowing of the bird welcoming the
18 rising sun.

19 Jesus was right. I denied him three times before the cock
20 crowed. That crowing was like a knife through my heart. My
21 world fell apart.

22 I wasn’t there for the rest of it. I was leaning against a wall
23 crying. When he died, I thought that I would spend the rest
24 of my life in ceaseless lament over that which I had done, or
25 had failed to do.

26 Then the Sabbath came and went and the women said
27 that his tomb was empty.

28 Then I remembered the rebuilding on the third day. Then
29 I remembered that he had said that he would defeat death
30 itself. Then I remembered.

31 The next many days are a blur. Jesus was with us. It
32 didn’t make any difference if it were a locked room or on the
33 edge of the sea. Suddenly Jesus was there. He came to us. He
34 told us many things that he had told us before, but now they
35 made sense to my mind as well as my heart.

Before he left, he asked me if I loved him. I said yes. He asked again and then again. Three times he asked and three times I said I loved him. He asked three times to remind me of my three denials and to show me that his love reached beyond even denial. Then he placed his hand on my shoulder and repeated the words that I had heard the first time that I ever met him. He said, "Follow me."

Once again I had my nets, but this time as a fisher of men. I was always just a simple fisherman. It was the strength of God that allowed the sand to become a rock.

I never denied him again. In my heart, in my mind, and in my total being, I remained firm in the proclamation that Jesus, my Lord, is the Christ, the Son of God, the Messiah. I will follow him forever. *(Pause, then place net back in its visible position. An appropriate hymn should follow.)*

IDENTIFYING OBJECT:

The identifying object for Peter is a fish net. The best method is to use a real fish net. Someone in the congregation might actually have a casting net, or one of the many decorative nets that are used for wall decorations. A small badminton net can also take on the appearance of a fish net if a few weights are attached to one side. It is best not to use a modern-style framed net that would be used for landing fish.



Pilate, The Politician Who Controlled

Identifying Object: A bowl of water and a large white towel

CHILDREN'S INTRODUCTION:

(Have a bowl of water on a small stand or table to one side of chancel. Have towel in hand.)

Boys and girls, I want to talk to you a little bit tonight about Pontius Pilate — and about this bowl of water. Pilate was governor of all Judea. That means he was the man in authority in Jerusalem. He was the man who sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion.

The Romans had a rather strange custom. If they wanted to take credit for killing someone, like in the case of a governor who sentenced someone to death, they would sometimes take some of that person's blood and smear it on their hands to show that they accepted responsibility for killing that person. But if they wanted to claim that they were totally innocent of that person's death, they would bring out a bowl of water and they would wash their hands in front of all the people to show them that they didn't have the blood of that person on their hands.

Pilate washed his hands in front of the Jews to claim that he was not responsible for the death of Jesus. He tried to wash his hands of Jesus, but it was truly Pilate who sentenced Jesus to be crucified.

Let's say a little prayer. Lord, never wash your hands of us as Pilate tried to wash his hands of you, but always care for us and call us to your kingdom. Amen. *(Place towel in visible position as children return to their seats.)*

CHANCEL INTRODUCTION:

Grace, mercy and peace from God, our Father and from

1 our Lord and Savior, Jesus, who is the Christ. (*Point or gesture*
2 *toward the bowl of water.*)

3 A bowl of innocence. Pilate tried to wash his hands of
4 Jesus, but he could not. Pilate was both a strong and weak
5 man. No one is sure whether or not Pilate really sought the
6 death of our Lord. As a matter of fact, most of what we know
7 about Pilate is theory and guess. Tonight when I wash my
8 hands at the bowl of innocence, for a few moments I will
9 become Pontius Pilate, and we will hear his story. (*Pause, then*
10 *go over to bowl of water.*)

11
12 **MAIN BODY OF SERMON:**

13
14 (*While dipping hands in bowl*)

15 **Lavabo inter innocentes manus meas. I wash my hands**
16 **among the innocent.** (*Pick up towel and dry hands. Continue to*
17 *hold towel.*)

18 I am Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea. I could have well
19 represented the empire in Gaul or Egypt or even Numidia. I
20 deserved one of those choice governorships. But no, I was
21 given the dregs of the Empire. I was assigned Judea.

22 Any Roman worth his salt knows that Judea isn't worth
23 the water to wash it into the Mediterranean. This desolate
24 wilderness is inhabited by a sloven, lazy people who demand
25 one day out of seven to rest and then say it is because their
26 God commands it. They are a stiff-necked rebellious people
27 who would just as soon kill a Roman as speak to one. That is
28 the Judea of which I was made governor.

29 If it weren't for the Parthians across the mountains,
30 Rome would have abandoned this pest hole to its fate years
31 ago. It is of no real value to the Empire, but if the Persians
32 do invade, it is best that the war be in a worthless place such
33 as this. Here Rome can afford the devastation of war without
34 serious threat to the Empire. So people such as me are sent
35 to govern Judea in the name of Rome.

1 **The Jews are a tricky people to govern. I learned what**
2 **it took to control these fanatics very shortly after I arrived.**
3 **My personal honor guard marched into the city in procession**
4 **and the people rioted in the streets. It wasn't the soldiers that**
5 **upset them. It seems that the emblems of our gods on the**
6 **shields and standards of the legion were an abomination to**
7 **their God. Who were they to tell Rome what could or could**
8 **not be displayed in a city of the Empire! I ordered them to**
9 **disperse or die. To a man they said that they would die for**
10 **their God. Six thousand of them actually lay down in the**
11 **streets and bared their neck for the sword. I knew better than**
12 **to fight something like that. They got the best of me that day,**
13 **but I learned from my mistake. I learned that any force that**
14 **I applied had to be done with a veiled hand. I learned that**
15 **day that it must never again look as if Rome went against the**
16 **gods of Judea.**

17 **I learned well and very quickly. In just a few years I was**
18 **able to appropriate the alms treasury of the Jewish temple**
19 **without significant resistance. I needed it for a water system**
20 **for the city. I marched right into the temple square with my**
21 **men and took the strong box. There was no riot that day. I**
22 **had learned. That day I was prepared to deal with these**
23 **fanatical Jews. Half of my men were dressed as the common**
24 **people of the streets, but with daggers concealed in their**
25 **sleeves. They were spread throughout the crowd before we**
26 **appeared. Any Jew who dared to object to what occurred died**
27 **before his words could stir the crowd to action. I said I had**
28 **learned how to control these fanatics. I had learned that you**
29 **have to be as ruthless as a jackal and as devious as a snake.**
30 **That is the only way to stay in control of Judea. Only once**
31 **did I ever really lose control. There was this Jewish prophet**
32 **from Nazareth. His name was Jesus.**

33 **Jesus wasn't actually that much of a problem for me. He**
34 **was trouble for the temple priests and they made their**
35 **troubles my troubles. They wanted him crucified. I knew he**

1 could be more trouble to me dead than he ever was alive. I
2 knew that it would never do for a Roman governor to be
3 accused of killing a Jewish holy man without good reason. I
4 had enough trouble with those religious fanatics, the Zealots,
5 without giving them a new cause for which to fight.

6 I could handle Jesus. He was never that much of a real
7 threat to my power. Even his “kingly” entrance into Jerusalem
8 and his disturbance at the temple were no real threat to my
9 soldiers. I was in control, and as long as the populace was
10 controlled, I could handle Jesus.

11 But he was undermining the power of the priests, and
12 they were very upset. My spies told me that Caiaphas was
13 practically livid when he was informed that Jesus had called
14 himself the Son of God. They wanted him crucified for his
15 blasphemy. If I crucified every single person who claimed to
16 be divine, I would have to hang the Emperor himself on a
17 cross. The priests knew that a charge of blasphemy meant
18 nothing to me. So, they charged him with treason. They
19 brought him before me on the charge that he had claimed to
20 be a king.

21 At first, I thought the problem would be easy to sidestep.
22 Jesus was a Galilean. So I sent him to Herod, Tetrarch of
23 Galilee. The Tetrarch’s father, Herod the King, once killed all
24 the children in a village near here because it was “rumored”
25 that one of them might grow up to be a king. Herod, the
26 Tetrarch, wasn’t Herod, the King. That spineless wonder did
27 nothing but send Jesus back to me — and that on the very
28 same day.

29 It wasn’t a good situation. My wife advised me to have
30 nothing to do with this Jesus. She said that she had been
31 warned in a dream. She said that he was innocent. I knew
32 that. I didn’t need a dream to tell me that. If she wanted to
33 have a useful dream, she should have dreamt of a way to get
34 me out of this. If I had him killed and his followers rioted, I
35 would be in trouble with Rome. If I didn’t have him killed and

1 the priest stirred up the people, I would be in just as much
2 trouble. With just a few heated words, I could have a revolt
3 within the city by morning. Any other time of the year, the
4 situation would be controllable, but it was Passover and every
5 fanatic Jew in all Judea was in Jerusalem for the Holy Days.

6 None of my usual schemes worked. I have discovered,
7 however, that when nothing else will work, it pays to be
8 creative. One of the advantages of being a provincial governor
9 was that I was allowed to accommodate the traditions of the
10 province for the sake of peace within the Empire. That was a
11 very handy escape clause when it was to my advantage to
12 ignore some of the finer details of the law of Rome. Besides,
13 if a tradition didn't exist to suit my purposes, who was Rome
14 to say who could or could not begin or modify a provincial
15 tradition?

16 I had it announced to the people, that in conformance
17 with tradition and in celebration of their festival, I, Pontius
18 Pilate, gracious and merciful Prefect of Judea, would release
19 to them a prisoner of their choosing.

20 It was simple. It was expedient. It was brilliant. When
21 the crowd yelled for me to release their prophet, the problem
22 would once again belong to the priests and I would have peace
23 within the city.

24 I chose the other man very carefully. I couldn't risk the
25 chance that the crowd would not choose their prophet. The
26 other prisoner had to be someone that no one liked. He had
27 to be someone that everyone hated. He had to be someone
28 like . . . Jesus Barabbas. He was perfect. He claimed to be a
29 Zealot, but even the deaf beggars on the streets knew that
30 this one was just a common thief and a murderer. There was
31 no doubt that the people would choose their prophet.

32 I couldn't believe my ears when the cry went up, "Give
33 us Barabbas! Give us Barabbas!" I had underestimated the
34 temple priests. They were as tricky as I was. Their money
35 must have been spread throughout that crowd.

1 I had to release Barabbas, but I still wasn't ready to
2 crucify Jesus. I turned him over to my soldiers to be scourged
3 or whatever they wished. Maybe I was just hoping that he
4 would die at their hands. Then at least if trouble arose, I could
5 blame the carelessness of the soldiers for the problems.

6 The Galilean was stronger than he looked. He survived
7 the scourging. I brought him back before the people. He looked
8 so pathetic standing there with that crown of thorns and a
9 cast-off purple robe. I was sure that the crowd would take
10 pity on him and demand his release. But no, they cried out
11 all the more, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" I practically begged
12 them to ask for mercy. They wanted blood.

13 Then I heard someone in the crowd cry out, "If you
14 release this man, you are no friend of Caesar's." That had to
15 be one of the priests. Only one of Caiaphas' men would have
16 used the technical term like that to remind me that I held my
17 position "Amicus Caesaris" — a friend of Caesar. One hot-
18 headed Jew with the ear of the Emperor could have me
19 recalled to Rome in chains. I had to crucify him, but I wasn't
20 going to take the blame. At that point, I no longer really cared
21 if he lived or died, but if there was trouble, somebody else
22 was going to pay the price. I was not going to accept
23 responsibility. "Lavabo inter innocentes manus meas." I wash
24 my hands among the innocent.

25 All for nothing. I should have just released him and let
26 the events take their course. It made no real difference. A few
27 years later I was exiled to Gaul . . . Gaul at last — as an exile.
28 Some bleeding-heart advisor to the Emperor convinced him
29 that we needed the Jews and Samaritans as our friends.
30 Caesar became upset that I slaughtered a few hundred
31 Samaritans who tried to prevent me from seizing their temple
32 treasury. I, Pontius Pilate, who could have governed Gaul,
33 was sent there in exile.

34 I thought that at least in exile I would have the consolation
35 of being free, at last, of this Jesus. Killing him had accomplished

nothing. It seems that the tomb couldn't hold him back from death. Shortly after his death, Judea became full of the stories of the resurrection of this man from Nazareth. The Jews who followed him said it proved that he was the Messiah, the Christ. In Gaul I had hoped to be free of these stories, free of these Christians, free of these fanatical Jews. But it wasn't just the Jews who began to believe in this Christ. The stories followed me to Gaul. Everywhere there were Christians telling the story of this Christ. They spread to the very borders of the Empire and beyond.

Who was this man? What was this man? He wasn't a king — not like any king that I have ever known. For sure he was not an insurrectionist. He called for no violent revolution. He raised no powerful army. And yet, he overthrew the power of the mighty Roman Empire. Who was he? What was he? I can't help but think that he must have been exactly what he claimed to be all along — the Christ, the Son of God. *(Pause, place towel in visible spot. An appropriate hymn should follow.)*

IDENTIFYING OBJECT:

The identifying object for Pilate is the "lavabo bowl" and a large white towel. Almost any large, ornate bowl will suffice. A large silver fruit or candy bowl or a stemmed glass compote dish would have the appearance of the type of bowls used by the Romans in this time period. It is probably best to have the bowl sitting on a small table near the lectern or pulpit and to use the towel as the object that is moved and carried during the sermon.

The symbolic washing of the hands is still used in the Roman Catholic mass. The words "lavabo inter innocentes manus meas" are from the Latin mass.



Centurion, The Soldier Who Proclaimed

Identifying Object: A Roman shield

CHILDREN'S INTRODUCTION:

(Carry shield.)

Boys and girls, this is sort of like the shield of a Roman soldier. Theirs were made of wood and covered with leather and metal so that they could stop a sword, but they were sort of like this. The foot soldiers carried a big rectangular shield that was almost as big as they were. Officers and others who rode horses carried smaller shields something like this.

A Centurion would have carried a shield like this. There was a Centurion in charge of the guards the day that Christ was crucified. That day after he saw all that occurred when Jesus died on the cross, the Centurion said, "Truly this man was the Son of God." The Centurion recognized that they had crucified the Son of God.

Let's say a little prayer. Dear Lord, we give you thanks that you sent your Son, Jesus, to die for our sins that we may have eternal life. Amen. *(Place shield in visible position as children return to their seats.)*

CHANCEL INTRODUCTION:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, who is the Christ. *(Point or gesture toward the shield.)*

The shield of the Centurion, the officer in charge of the crucifixion of Jesus. It was not the life of Jesus, but his death that led the Centurion to proclaim, "Truly, this man was the Son of God." Tonight, when I pick up the Roman shield, for a few moments I will become the Centurion, and we will hear his story. *(Pause, then pick up shield and put it on arm.)*

1 MAIN BODY OF SERMON:

2
3 While I was in Judea, it was unusual for anyone to
4 address me by my given name. The men beneath me called
5 me "Sir." Almost everyone else called me "Centurion."

6 I was in charge of one hundred men stationed in
7 Jerusalem. Normally there were only a few hundred Roman
8 soldiers in the area. On those occasions when Jerusalem filled
9 with the thousands of pilgrims that would swarm to the city
10 for the Jewish festivals, Pilate would come from Caesarea
11 with the rest of the cohort. Then we would have a thousand
12 men within the city walls. Even still, I often wondered if they
13 would be enough if the people turned against us.

14 One year, just before the big Passover festival, a dispute
15 arose among the Jews that threatened to bring turmoil to the
16 city. It seems that a prophet from Nazareth had gone too far
17 in his preaching against the temple priests. They demanded
18 his death. His trial was a mockery of our laws and theirs, but
19 the people cried for crucifixion and so it was decreed. I was
20 the Centurion in charge of the Jerusalem Century, and so it
21 fell to me to see that the orders were carried out.

22 I had my orders, but I didn't like them. There was too much
23 danger of riot. There were too many people in the city. The
24 crime had been insurrection, but it was somehow mixed up
25 with a religious dispute involving the temple priests.
26 Whenever you mix religion and revolution, you have a
27 dangerous situation. Often in Judea it was impossible to
28 separate the two.

29 Some of the old officers could remember the revolt that
30 occurred about ten years after the death of Herod the King.
31 A man named Judas something or other, a rabbi from Galilee,
32 claimed that it was God's will that the Jews not pay Roman
33 taxes. He gathered followers around himself and led a revolt
34 against Rome. He was destroyed almost immediately, of
35 course, but his revolution never really died out. Those who

1 had followed him began calling themselves “Zealots.” They
2 said that they burned with zeal for their God and their
3 country. They were insane, each and every one of them, but
4 they were also very dangerous. They were more than willing
5 to die as long as they took a Roman to hell with them. When
6 the Zealots were around, a Roman wasn’t safe on the streets.
7 A sudden dagger from nowhere or a heavy stone from a rooftop
8 and the fanatics would claim another victory.

9 This Jesus of Nazareth didn’t look like a Zealot. He
10 preached love, not hatred. There seemed to be something
11 different about him, but I still couldn’t take any chances. I
12 doubled the guard for the day and lined the street with my
13 men where we would pass.

14 I had once underestimated the Jews. I would never do
15 so again. When I was newly arrived in Judea and still full of
16 dreams of Roman superiority, I pursued two of these Zealot
17 bandits into the hills. None of them ever returned.

18 Only a fool would underestimate the Zealots. I was not
19 a fool. I was ready with my men at full strength and ready for
20 battle when Jesus and two criminals were turned over to us.
21 As was the custom, each prisoner carried the wood on which
22 he would die.

23 Jesus appeared to have been severely weakened by his
24 treatment at the hands of Pilate. He stumbled and fell several
25 times. Each time I was afraid that it was a signal to assassins
26 in the crowd, but the crowd remained strangely silent.

27 I had expected shouts of hatred from his friends. Instead,
28 I heard sounds of sorrow. As we passed, I could hear the
29 murmurings of the crowd. One voice said, “He gave me back
30 my sight.” Another said, “He made me to walk.” A third voice,
31 a woman’s, wailed, “He gave me back my son.”

32 Then Jesus fell the third time. It was no trick. He was
33 near death. Despite the whip, he was unable to rise beneath
34 his burden. I pointed to a large man standing in the crowd.
35 “You, carry this cross to Calvary.” The man’s name was Simon



CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS

Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:

SIX LIVES - SIX STORIES

by Michael W. Massa.

*For performance rights and/or a complete copy of the script,
please contact us at:*

CHRISTIAN PUBLISHERS

P.O. Box 248 - Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406

Toll Free: 1-844-841-6387 - Fax (319) 368-8011

customerservice@christianpub.com