

**FRIDAY...GOOD FRIDAY...
FRIDAY NIGHT**

by Carl W. Simpson



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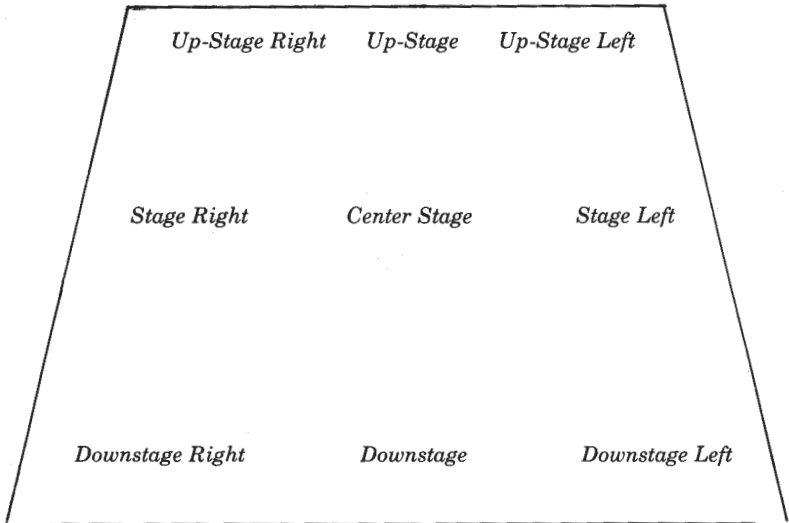
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STAGE DIRECTIONS

The stage is bare except for three podiums, one Stage Right and two Stage Left; a large cross standing Up Center; a large Tenebrae candle on a low stand immediately in front of the cross; and a number (10-15) of smaller candles spread across front and along sides of stage. Except for the candles — which are lit before the audience arrives — the only lighting is by area and spot lighting on the READERS and PLAYERS. If the stage is so large that the initial action by the PLAYERS is not visible, a low area light might be used on them.



CAST

Three READERS

Two PLAYERS

PRODUCTION NOTES

Congregation/Audience is greeted and the evening's service is introduced. It is suggested that the audience be invited into a time of contemplation and meditation, that the purpose of the evening is reflection on the event of Jesus' death.

Singing of traditional Calvary-related songs should begin the evening. The suggested last song before the play might be "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," or some similar hymn. The song selection should be done with the conscious attempt to avoid setting a depressing mood. The purpose of the play is not to depress but to focus attention and thought on Jesus' death. A successful presentation will invite people to a place of serious reflection and may even invite some to experience anew some grief for the death of Jesus. Any external attempts to manipulate the emotions of the audience will only serve to negate the message of the play.

The play does not actually have an end. Rather, it is designed to establish a train of thought in the audience's mind that will lead to a new and deeper and more celebrative Easter morning experience.

SCENE I

AT RISE: On the last verse of “When I Survey . . .” the three READERS enter and assume positions behind podiums: READER 1 is Stage Right, READERS 2 and 3 are Stage Left. Each enters with a small lighted candle which they place on their podiums. When the song ends, all lights go out briefly. The play begins as READER 1 begins reading and area spots come up on READER 1 and the other READERS. On READER 1’s last lines, the two PLAYERS enter and begin loosening the cross to lower it, setting the large Tenebrae candle and stand to the side. Except where noted, READERS address the audience.

READER 1: “By this time evening had come; and as it was Preparation Day — that is, the day before the Sabbath — Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Council and one who was eagerly awaiting the Kingdom of God, bravely went in to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead; so he sent for the centurion and asked him whether it had been long since Jesus had died. When he heard the centurion’s report, he gave Joseph leave to take the dead body. So Joseph bought a linen sheet, took him down from the cross, and wrapped him in the sheet. Then he laid him in a tomb cut out of the rock, and rolled a stone against the entrance.”

READER 2: It is finished.

READER 3: He is dead . . . and gone.

READER 1: *(To other READERS; calm, but surprised by the interruption.)* Excuse me, I haven’t finished yet.

READER 3: *(To READER 1)* He’s dead, you know.

READER 2: . . . and buried — it’s been at least several hours. Remember, he was buried before the sun went down.

READER 1: *(Sees the two PLAYERS lowering the cross.)* Wait! Stop!

1 **Don't take the cross down. This is Easter!** (*PLAYERS stop*
2 *to look at READERS.*) **Now, let me go on:** (*To audience*) **"But**
3 **on the first morning of the week, at early dawn, they**
4 **went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.**
5 **And they ..."**

6 **READER 3:** (*To audience, deliberately*) **This is Friday ... Good**
7 **Friday ... Friday night ...**

8 **READER 2:** **To the Jew, it's really Saturday ... the Sabbath.**

9 **READER 3:** **... and he's dead; they've taken his body to be**
10 **buried ...** (*PLAYERS exit.*)

11 **READER 2:** **... so that he won't be on the cross on the Sabbath.**

12 **READER 1:** **What are you talking about? We can't take the**
13 **cross down. This is Easter, and we always have a cross**
14 **to remind us of Easter.**

15 **READER 2:** (*To READER 1*) **But he's not there anymore.**

16 **READER 3:** **He's gone ...**

17 **READER 2:** **He's dead ...**

18 **READER 1:** **That's just temporary. I was just about to read**
19 **the part where the women discover the empty tomb and**
20 **realize ...**

21 **READER 2:** **But he *is* dead, and buried. The man Jesus died a**
22 **very slow, painful death, and there's no way to avoid**
23 **that.** (*To READER 1 and audience*) **No matter whether his**
24 **life, death, and resurrection may have been part of some**
25 **divine plan devised in heaven long before the world was**
26 **created: the fact before us is that Jesus of Nazareth was**
27 **a man, and that he was crucified at a place called Calvary.**

28 **READER 3:** **Not only that, but he literally allowed it to happen:**
29 **he long before chose a way of life which could only lead**
30 **to a violent, early death. To speak of the Resurrection**
31 **focuses on Jesus being of God; to speak of the Crucifixion**
32 **reminds us that Jesus was very human.**

33 **READER 2:** **That's why we've come tonight, not for the**
34 **Resurrection, but because of the Crucifixion: to take the**
35 **cross down.** (*PLAYERS step back on stage, blow out candles*

Up Right and Up Left.)

READER 3: ...and extinguish the candles ... (*READER 2 blows out next to READER 3*) **all, except one ...** (*READER 2 moves large Tenebrae candle and stands back to Up Center in front of cross that is now leaning against wall*) **it we'll carry from here, until Sunday morning, the first morning of the week; because the light of Humanity has been taken away.**

READER 2: (*From Up Center*) **He is not here.**

READER 3: He is dead . . . and buried.

READER 1: But he's not dead, he's alive — remember: He came back!

READER 2: (*Having returned to podium, to READER 1*) **Come with us, (*Turning to audience*) be with us . . .**

READER 3: ... be there as one of the believers.

READER 2: Let us all be there that night, as we as believers . . .

READER 3: Be with us, then, when they nailed him when he died.

READER 2: ... when we buried him, when he was gone. (*Pause*)

READER 3: It is Friday . . . Good Friday . . . Friday night . . .

READER 2: Sabbath for the Jews . . .

READERS 2 and 3: ... and he is dead ... and buried.

(At this point, there could be a break with congregational and/or choral singing if it seems appropriate; READERS move all podiums Stage Left, exiting during singing. At beginning of next scene, READERS assume positions behind podiums and PLAYERS stand Stage Right and Up Right, three-quarter turn to right; scene begins as lights on READERS come up.)

SCENE II

READER 3: He is dead, the cross is still warm from his body, his body is not yet cold . . . they have rolled the stone in place. He is dead . . . buried . . . gone.

READER 2: He is dead.

- 1 **ALL READERS:** *He is dead.*
- 2 **READER 1:** **Say then, who was he?** (*PLAYERS turn; PLAYER*
3 *1, as Jesus, standing and facing audience; PLAYER 2 sits Down*
4 *Right, facing PLAYER 1.*)
- 5 **PLAYER 1:** (*As lights come up*) **Tell me, who is it that the people**
6 **are saying I am?**
- 7 **READER 1:** **Elijah.**
- 8 **READER 2:** **Jeremiah.**
- 9 **READER 3:** **John the Baptist.**
- 10 **READER 1:** **One of the prophets.**
- 11 **PLAYER 1:** **But who is it that you say I am?**
- 12 **PLAYER 2:** **You are the Christ, the son of the Living God.**
- 13 **PLAYER 1:** **Blessed are you, Simon! For it was not by any**
14 **human means that you learned this; it was from your**
15 **God in heaven.** (*Lights Stage Right go out.*)
- 16 **READER 1:** **He was Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah.**
- 17 **READER 2:** **A carpenter.**
- 18 **READER 3:** **The True Light coming into the world, the**
19 **Promised One.**
- 20 **READER 2:** **A little brown Jew riding on a donkey.**
- 21 **READER 1:** **Son of God, Son of Humanity.**
- 22 **READER 2:** **Some mother's baby . . . some mother's child.**
- 23 **READER 3:** **Ruler of Rulers, Sovereign of Sovereigns.**
- 24 **READER 1:** **Master, Teacher . . .**
- 25 **READER 2:** **Just a man . . . in very many ways, just one more.**
- 26 **READER 1:** **Emmanuel, God with us, the Lamb of God, the**
27 **King of the Jews.**
- 28 **READER 2:** **A man hanging on a cross between two thieves.**
29 (*Pause*)
- 30 **READER 3:** **"...and to whom has the arm of God been**
31 **revealed? He grew up like a young plant, like a root out**
32 **of dry ground; he had neither form nor comeliness nor**
33 **beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and**
34 **rejected, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief."** (*Pause*)
35 **Now, the ones sent by the Pharisees to question John**

1 asked him: "Then why are you baptizing if you are neither
2 the Christ nor Elijah, nor one of the prophets?"

3 **READER 1:** I am baptizing with water; but there stands
4 among you one who is to come after me, the thong of
5 whose sandal I am not worthy to untie. (*Pause*)

6 **READER 2:** Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, held in honor by
7 all the people, stood up and ordered Peter and the
8 apostles to be put outside.

9 **PLAYER 2:** (*As Gamaliel, to audience*) Men of Israel, take care
10 what you do with these men. For before Theudas arose,
11 giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men,
12 about four hundred, joined him; but he was slain and all
13 who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing.
14 After him, Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the
15 census and drew away some of the people after him; he
16 also perished, and all who followed him were scattered.
17 So in the present situation, with these followers of this
18 Jesus of Nazareth, I tell you: keep away from these men
19 and let them alone. If this plan or this undertaking is of
20 men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able
21 to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing
22 God! (*Pause*)

23 **READER 3:** He is dead, his body is not yet cold. He is dead
24 ... buried ... gone.

25 **READER 2:** He is dead.

26 **ALL READERS:** He is *dead*.

27 **READER 1:** Dead ... as in death.

28 **PLAYER 1:** (*Addressing audience and rest of cast as a professor*
29 *lecturing*) Our research into the barbaric practice of
30 crucifixion, invented by the Romans to strike fear into
31 the hearts of all of its subjugated people, reveals that
32 Jesus must have suffered a horrible death. When a victim
33 is hung from a cross by nails driven through the wrists,
34 not the palms as often depicted, several things occur.
35 The victim's movements are painfully restricted. He

cannot help himself, defend himself or free himself. He may endeavor to support himself with effort to make his breathing easier but his muscles cannot endure that effort for long. As a result the weight of the victim's body pulling itself down eventually cuts off the breathing and suffocation occurs. When Jesus was crucified he was tortured beyond what I have described. When he asked for water he was given something distasteful. He had a spear thrust into his side to see if he still lived. Whether he died from suffocation, pain or a total dysfunction of his bodily functions is unknown. All we do know for a certainty is that he died a horrible death . . . *(Pause)*

READER 1: He was despised and rejected; a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief; as one from whom we hide our faces. He was despised, and we took no thought of him.

READER 3: He endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have borne. All the while we thought that his suffering was punishment sent by God.

READER 2: But because of our sins he was wounded, beaten because of the evil we did. We are healed by the punishment he suffered, received.

READER 1: Teacher, what is the great commandment of the law?

PLAYER 1: You shall love your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

ALL READERS: This commandment I give: that you love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this, that a person lay their life down for their friends.

PLAYER 2: *(As Pilate, PLAYER 1 is kneeling before him, hands behind back, head down.)* I offer you either Jesus, who has done nothing, or the criminal Barabbas. One I will crucify,

1 the other set free.

2 **ALL READERS:** Crucify Jesus; give us Barabbas; set Jesus

3 free; Barabbas, give us Barabbas; crucify Jesus; etc.

4 **PLAYER 2:** (*Silencing them with a wave*) Take him away,

5 centurion. Make short work of him, then let Barabbas

6 go. (*Pause*)

7 **READER 3:** He is dead, they have rolled the stone in place.

8 He is dead . . . buried . . . gone.

9 **READER 2:** He is dead.

10 **ALL READERS:** He is dead.

11 **READER 1:** He,

12 **READER 2:** Jesus,

13 **READER 1:** is dead . . .

14 **READER 3:** as in death.

15 **READER 1:** And they ask, "Is that all there was? That he is

16 dead? Is there no more to be said?" (*PLAYERS 1 and 2 are*

17 *Down Right.*)

18 **PLAYER 1:** (*A Roman*) Well, Jew, your deed is done, your

19 'King' is dead.

20 **PLAYER 2:** (*A Jew, irritated by the Roman's comment*) Don't call

21 him *our* king, he is not, was not our king. And it's not

22 just our deed — you Romans wanted him dead too.

23 **PLAYER 1:** Some did, some did. There's so much I don't

24 understand about all that has happened. Such as, "Why?"

25 **PLAYER 2:** "Why?" Why what? Why was he killed?

26 **PLAYER 1:** That's good for starters: why did he die?

27 **PLAYER 2:** That depends on whom you ask: We wanted him

28 dead because he was a heretic, a troublemaker,

29 misleading the people, giving them false hope and

30 terrible theology; not to mention making it dangerous

31 for us with Herod and Pilate and Caesar. You Romans

32 wanted him dead before he stirred up the people too

33 much. Had he gone on, you might have had a rebellion,

34 and that's the last thing Pilate or Herod wanted!

35 **PLAYER 1:** What about his followers?

1 **PLAYER 2:** Them? I doubt we will ever hear from them again.

2 They were zealous, so I'm not sure. Probably inventing
3 some tale about his dying for them, and plotting to steal
4 the body and claim he's really not dead. The worst thing
5 about this whole mess is the timing, coming at Passover.
6 I can see it now: his followers are going to compare his
7 death with the different parts of the Passover because
8 they coincided. They'll make up some something about
9 him being the new Paschal Lamb. That's how crazy some
10 of them are.

11 **PLAYER 1:** What it comes down to is that he was killed
12 because of what he did. Isn't that the why? Whether his
13 followers make up some religious excuses, the fact is, it
14 was not just who he was, but what he did.

15 **PLAYER 2:** Yes, probably had he stayed in Galilee, he would
16 have faded away by now, and we would have long since
17 forgotten him, had his reputation even reached Jerusalem.

18 **PLAYER 1:** But you see, that's just it. That's the "why." Why
19 didn't he stay in Galilee?

20 **PLAYER 2:** Obviously, because he was misguided, or not as
21 wise as the people thought. Why didn't he stay in Galilee?
22 Why did he gather a bunch of people as he did to travel
23 with him? Why did they go all over arousing the people?
24 And what for? He never spoke of rebellion or started a
25 riot. There are no accounts of his urging the people to
26 resist the Roman authorities.

27 **PLAYER 1:** If anything, he spoke the opposite: he told people
28 to love their enemies, and surely you Jews hate few as
29 you hate us Romans. He told people to go overboard when
30 doing for others — that talk of going the extra distance,
31 of giving one's cloak as well as the coat. He was
32 surrounded by the poor, the outcasts, the powerless. And
33 why? Surely he knew that would be trouble. I heard him
34 speak to some of the crowds. I was there when Pilate
35 interrogated him: he was bright, intelligent, articulate —

1 not what one would call a genius, but he seemed to be
2 wise, and obviously had thought about all he said and did.

3 **PLAYER 2:** If he was so wise — then he must have long
4 realized what he was doing was going to get himself
5 killed.

6 **PLAYER 1:** That's what I mean: surely he knew what would
7 happen. It was as if he did it on purpose, that he knew
8 what would happen and yet he set out to do the very
9 things which would get him into trouble.

10 **PLAYER 2:** If he was as smart as you say, he could have
11 gotten a small following, opened a school in Galilee and
12 taught his thing. He could have lived to a ripe old age
13 and had many followers and students. But no, he chose
14 a life that ended in his death, and his few followers have
15 all run away. If you're right, it shows he was crazy, as if
16 he was on a path of self-destruction, that his whole
17 purpose was to get killed, as if he had some martyr
18 complex. The odds were against him: if we didn't get him,
19 you would have, or the zealots or maybe even some of
20 his own people.

21 **PLAYER 1:** I don't know. I don't think he was crazy. I had the
22 feeling from listening to him that it was more important
23 for him to do what he felt was right than any consequence.
24 My guess is he knew what the consequences might be,
25 but he went his way regardless. He wasn't crazy. *(Pause)*

26 **READER 3:** Crazy?

27 **READER 2:** Suicidal?

28 **READER 3:** A martyr complex?

29 **READER 1:** Surely not: forty days in the wilderness with the
30 devil strengthened him rather than weakened him.

31 **READER 2:** A death wish? Not for one who had knelt three
32 times to pray . . .

33 **READER 3:** Abba, Father: if there is any way for this cup
34 from me . . . not as I will, but your will be done.

35 **READER 1:** How many more times had he prayed that prayer?



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