

INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT

by Jon McCauley Smith



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**INTO YOUR HANDS I
COMMEND MY SPIRIT**

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Possible Order of Service

- I. Prelude
- II. Opening Hymn
- III. Unison Prayer
- IV. Scripture about the Lord's Supper
- V. Choir Special: "In the Upper Room"
- VI. Meditation
- VII. The Lord's Supper
- VIII. Tenebrae Service — Into Your Hands I
Commend My Spirit

CAST OF SPEAKERS:
(Readers)

DISCIPLE

JUDAS

CAIAPHAS

PETER

PILATE

ROBBER

CENTURION

VOICE OF JESUS

PRODUCTION NOTES

This Tenebrae service may be presented with a minimum of staging. Black robes or individual costumes relating to the characters portrayed will add some theatrical drama to the presentation, but neither are required. A lead-in by the pastor can achieve the setting in the minds of the viewers.

It is most effective if the speakers can be seated at a long supper table, with a lighted candle placed before each character. When each speaker has finished his part, which may be done from memory, he extinguishes his candle. When the last character, the Centurion, finishes his portrayal, the chancel area is in full darkness as the voice of Jesus is heard.

The interludes can be punctuated with a dramatic drum roll or with an organ passage.

Tenebrae is a Holy Week worship service dating back to the 18th century. Traditionally, it is a candlelight service commemorating the suffering and death of Christ. It is this tradition that inspired this format and title.

The darkness represents the sadness that overcame the world as God's son was crucified. The candles symbolize Christ, the light of the world.

INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT

- 1 DISCIPLE: After we shared the Passover meal with our master,
 2 we disciples were shocked to hear him tell us that that
 3 very night, we would all fall away from him. I remember
 4 how loudly we all protested. "Even if we must all die,"
 5 we promised, "we will not deny you." And Jesus just
 6 smiled at us. He knew then. He always knew. And he
 7 loved us even though he knew. We went to a place called
 8 Gethsemane where Jesus liked to pray in the silent beauty
 9 of that garden. And he asked three of us to come with
 10 him to a secret place to pray with him. He needed us! He
 11 told us he was afraid and sad, and he needed us to help
 12 him through this time. Imagine . . . Jesus needed us!
 13 *(Silence)* But we didn't help him. After giving of himself
 14 his whole life, there was no one there when he needed
 15 some support. Can you believe it? We just went to sleep.
 16 Three times, we just went to sleep. *(Extinguishes candle.)*
- 17 JESUS' VOICE: Mother, here is your son. . . . Disciple,
 18 there is your mother. *(Drum or organ interlude)*
- 19 JUDAS: I guess you all know me . . . at least my
 20 reputation. I'm the disciple called Judas Iscariot . . .
 21 the one who betrayed Jesus. I was there at that last
 22 Passover meal. Jesus washed my feet. I received the
 23 emblems of the sacrifice and the promise. And I was
 24 the one to leave — to go and alert the temple
 25 authorities to come and arrest my Lord . . . my friend.
 26 Oh yes, he was my friend. But he wasn't being the
 27 Christ I thought he should be. I expected him to do
 28 more about overthrowing the Romans and cleaning
 29 up our temple. And yet he was just so very peaceful —
 30 so loving. I guess I thought I could speed up this
 31 whole process — you know, force his hand — if I got
 32 him arrested. Then he would have to fight back. Then
 33 all those people who sang their alleluias and waved
 34 their palm branches when he marched into Jerusalem
 35 would have to rally around him and become an army.

1 But, oh, I never thought that Jesus would be betrayed
 2 by everyone! I never thought Jesus would have to
 3 face the cross alone and undefended! Oh, I am the
 4 one you all blame — but I'm not the only Judas.
 5 We were all Judases. We all turned our backs on him.
 6 *(Extinguishes candle.)*

7 JESUS' VOICE: Father forgive them, for they know not
 8 what they are doing. *(Organ or drum interlude.)*

9 CAIAPHAS: I am Caiaphas, the high priest. But that really
 10 doesn't mean anything. It's my father-in-law Annas
 11 who is the real power in the temple. He pushes me —
 12 nags me — bribes me. "This Jesus is dangerous," he
 13 kept telling me. "You must silence him." We had
 14 spies all over the countryside — spies who listened
 15 to what Jesus taught — spies who challenged Jesus
 16 to try to confuse him or prove him capable of making
 17 an error. But those spies didn't really find anything
 18 all that terrible about Jesus. He was a teacher — with
 19 some ideas about a loving God who was a little less
 20 fearsome and a lot more approachable than those
 21 Pharisees painted him. I didn't really see the harm . . .
 22 until Jesus came into town and I saw how the people
 23 cheered him. And then he came into the temple and
 24 caused that huge riot — knocking down all the
 25 merchant's tables. Now, that was just too much. I
 26 mean, first he threatened the priestly position of
 27 highest respect with that parade and then he endangered
 28 our money-making projects with the scene at the
 29 temple. He was dangerous! And I made sure he was
 30 stopped. We arrested him and we tried to bribe
 31 witnesses against him, but their testimonies didn't
 32 agree. He was going to get off on a technicality, but
 33 I asked him right out if he were the Messiah, and he
 34 said, "I am." Well, that was the word we were waiting
 35 for. We sent him to the Romans to be sentenced to

1 death, all because he claimed to be God. I had to
 2 do it. . . . If he were God, then there would be no
 3 need for a high priest. What would you have done?

4 (*Extinguishes candle.*)

5 JESUS' VOICE: I thirst . . . I thirst. (*Organ or drum*
 6 *interlude*)

7 PETER: I am Peter — the one Jesus called “The rock”
 8 — the holder of the keys to the kingdom — the one
 9 who first knew Jesus as the Messiah. When Judas
 10 kissed Jesus, I was sleeping. But I got up and pulled
 11 out my sword to defend him when the soldiers came
 12 to arrest him. But when Jesus told me to put it
 13 away, I ran with all the others. What else could I do?
 14 I was afraid of being crucified. Can you blame me?
 15 Have you ever seen anyone on a cross? All that agony
 16 All that awful screaming. So, I ran. But I circled
 17 back. I don’t know — something inside me called
 18 me to follow Jesus even then — find out what would
 19 happen to him — maybe even help him if he would
 20 let me. I don’t know. I stopped in a courtyard outside
 21 the high priest’s house. I was with a lot of other
 22 people — curiosity-seekers, servants of the house,
 23 scribes . . . lots of people just gathered around a fire
 24 keeping warm and listening to what was going on
 25 inside the house. A woman came up and said to me:
 26 “You were with Jesus.” I didn’t want to talk to her —
 27 I wanted to listen to what was happening inside —
 28 so I just told her she was wrong. I went closer to the
 29 house, and on the porch, another woman saw me and
 30 said, “Hey — this man was with Jesus of Nazareth!”
 31 I was afraid they would hear her inside and make
 32 me come in and testify against Jesus, so again I swore
 33 I never knew him. And then I heard Jesus confess to
 34 be the Christ. I heard Caiaphas and the others
 35 condemning him, and I staggered out of the courtyard

1 to lean against the wall surrounding the house. Some
 2 strangers from the courtyard came out and said:
 3 "You can't fool us — your clothes and your accent
 4 give you away." And I cried out in anger — just so
 5 they would leave me alone — "I do not know the
 6 man!" And immediately, the rooster crowed. And I
 7 remembered Jesus telling me that before the cock
 8 crowed I would deny him three times. I have denied
 9 him . . . I have betrayed him . . . and I went out
 10 and wept bitterly. (*Extinguishes candle.*)

11 JESUS' VOICE: My God, My God — why hast thou
 12 forsaken me?" (*Organ or drum interlude*)

13 PILATE: My name is Pilate, the governor of this land. I
 14 make thousands of decisions every day — some good,
 15 some bad. But the only one I am remembered for is
 16 the one I made this night. It was in the wee hours
 17 of the morning that the mob woke me up. I really
 18 wasn't sleeping very well because my wife had
 19 been having bad dreams all night . . . dreams about
 20 what was about to happen to me. The Jewish priests
 21 were all in a snit. They dragged in this man named
 22 Jesus. He looked so pitiful. What could they have
 23 against this man? They told me they wanted to
 24 sentence Jesus to death. I asked Jesus some questions.
 25 But I didn't see anything bad enough for crucifixion.
 26 So, I said: "I find no fault in this man. He's just
 27 a little bit misguided, that's all." Well, I figured the
 28 people would cheer me for being merciful, you know?
 29 But they didn't. Here they were, these same people
 30 who just days ago sang their songs of Zion to Jesus
 31 as he rode into town on a donkey, and now they
 32 were shouting "Crucify him!" Crucify him. Oh!
 33 Didn't they know what a horrible thing they were
 34 asking for? I pleaded with them — even offered to
 35 set him free after a few whippings. Still, they shouted:

1 “Crucify him!” I offered to release him as a holiday
 2 present, but they wanted Barabbas — a common thief
 3 and revolutionary — to be released instead. What
 4 could I do? What could I do? I went to the basin and
 5 washed my hands before the crowd and said: “I am
 6 innocent of this man’s blood.” But I’m not, you know.
 7 None of us is. I condemned him — and if you had been
 8 in that crowd that day, you probably would have
 9 been shouting “Crucify him,” too. None of us is
 10 innocent. (*Extinguishes candle.*)

11 JESUS’ VOICE: It is finished. . . . It is finished.

12 (*Organ or drum interlude*)

13 ROBBER: You don’t know me. Nobody remembers me;
 14 nobody should, I guess. I am just a poor man. One of
 15 those that the Messiah was coming to help. I lived in
 16 the countryside, two, maybe three days’ journey away,
 17 but I came into Jerusalem for the Passover. Oh, not
 18 to worship God or anything. I’m not that kind of a
 19 man. I’m a robber. And I knew that many, many
 20 rich men would be in Jerusalem for the Passover . . .
 21 and so I came, too . . . to make myself rich. But I
 22 was caught and I was made an example of to the
 23 people. Bad luck, that was all. The luck of the poor —
 24 to be crucified. When I walked the Way of Sorrows
 25 to that hill shaped like a skull, I saw there were two
 26 others being crucified with me. Two of us were just
 27 robbers, and we were tied to the cross. The one in
 28 the middle was something really bad — the sign
 29 said he was the King of the Jews — and he was
 30 being nailed to the cross. The hollow sound of metal
 31 piercing human flesh made me shudder. The gush
 32 of blood that spurted up until the head of the nail
 33 crushed the wound was horrible. I heard the people
 34 mock this king. And so I joined in, too. Seemed
 35 harmless enough . . . anyway, we would all be dead

1 soon enough. "Hey, are you really the Messiah?" I
 2 cried. "Then, save yourself and us, too!" The people
 3 laughed. It seemed funny at the time. The other robber
 4 told me to shut up. We were guilty of our crimes, he
 5 told me — Jesus wasn't. And then Jesus looked over
 6 to him and said something — but he didn't say
 7 anything to me. I had betrayed him . . . I had denied
 8 him. (*Extinguishes candle.*)

9 JESUS' VOICE: Today you will be with me in Paradise.
 10 (*Organ or drum interlude*)

11 CENTURION: I am a Roman centurion. It was my job
 12 that night to stand guard over those being crucified.
 13 I always dread this detail, but this night, especially,
 14 because there was one who had to be nailed to the
 15 cross. I watched him as he was laid on the crosspiece,
 16 and I had to give the order to hammer the spike
 17 through his wrist. The nail was held in place by one
 18 centurion. The hammer was perched above in the air
 19 by another. And the command caught in my throat.
 20 I tried to give it — but those eyes kept looking at me.
 21 There was something in them — I don't know — call
 22 it peace or forgiveness or something like that. I could
 23 have done it if he had hated me. I could have done
 24 it if he had dared me to do it . . . but he just kept
 25 looking up so patiently — pitying *me*! Someone from
 26 the crowd yelled, "Hit!" and the deed was done. I
 27 walked away. I heard the sounds of metal hitting
 28 metal. I heard the cries and the cheers from the
 29 watching crowd. And then I turned in time to see
 30 him thrust up on the standard hanging in that inhuman
 31 way. I yelled at the crowds to disperse. And soon there
 32 were only a few left . . . waiting. To pass the time,
 33 my friends and I cast lots for the clothes of the
 34 victims. I won. But what would I ever do with them?
 35 Still it haunts me. When the hour came for them to



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