

CRIES OF FAITH

by Jeffery B. Snyder



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PRODUCTION NOTES

The story of Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem is well known to Christians both young and old. It is so familiar that for many, the drama of the story and its powerful message have been muted by the old familiar lines. These vignettes attempt to recapture the wonder and the intimate meaning of Christ's death and Resurrection. Individuals whose lives were touched during Jesus' earthly ministry recount their stories. Through their emotional narratives, the audience will be caught up in the important events leading up to and including the Resurrection and will interpret the Easter story in a different and perhaps startling light.

Sometimes the events leading to Jesus' death and Resurrection may seem mysterious and distant, particularly to the young. It may be difficult for children and adults alike to grasp the relevance to their daily lives of the biblical accounts of Jesus' miraculous cures and extraordinary forgiveness. More difficult yet are the facts related in the first four gospels concerning the religious and political furor surrounding Jesus' life and leading to his death and ultimate triumph. The resulting confusion diminishes the impact of one of Christianity's greatest celebrations of life and faith.

Dramatic monologs such as these provide one very useful tool for clarifying some of the events surrounding Easter. Monologs bring the Easter story into dramatic focus by dealing with very personal individual accounts of events which are more easily understood than the usual recitation of events leading to the drama in Jerusalem, especially by children. The monologs presented here use ten individuals to recount the events leading up to and including the Resurrection. (The character of Peter is used twice.)

Each monolog may be performed individually over six weeks leading up to Easter or together as part of a special service. If performed separately, only a cast of one male and one female is absolutely necessary, although a larger cast would provide more diversity and make the job easier for the actors.

Simple costumes will help set the scene and draw the audience into each performance. Both the men and the women may wear solid-colored or striped floor-length robes and a *kaffiyeh*, or headpiece — a rectangular length of fabric. The men should tie a piece of cord around their heads to keep the cloth in place,

while the women wear it loose and draped around their faces.

No stage sets are necessary. The narratives themselves will paint vivid enough mental pictures to keep the audience's attention. Cast members should speak directly to the audience, creating an intimate atmosphere and allowing their characters to tell their tales as they saw them and to explain their deeds as only they can.

These short monologs are designed to meet the requirements of church groups which may not have a great deal of space, time or props to spare during the ever-busy Easter season. If you would like to research the characters in more detail to enhance your interpretation of the scripts, the biblical verses used for reference in creating each monolog are listed below:

- 1) Zacchaeus — Luke 19:1-10
- 2) The Samaritan Leper — Luke 17:11-19
- 3) Thomas (Feeding the 5,000) — Mark 6:30-44
Note: In the monolog the author only refers to the crowd as thousands, not five thousand. It was customary during the period only to count the men present. This is grossly unfair and diminishes the magnitude of the feat as there were undoubtedly many thousands of hungry women and children accompanying the men.
- 4) Blind Bartimaeus — Mark 10:46-52
- 5) A Pharisee (Healing on the Sabbath) — Mark 3:1-6
- 6) Mary of Bethany — John 12:1-8
- 7) Judas — Matthew 26:14-56
- 8) Peter (Denial) — John 18:15-27
- 9) Barabbas — Matthew 27:26
- 10) Mary Magdalene — Matthew 28:1-10
- 11) Peter (and the Resurrection) — John 21:1-19

Note: While this is the third Resurrection appearance presented in John, there is some dispute over the arrangement of the text in John and the date of origin for each Resurrection story. The author's monolog proceeds from the premise that Peter was unaware that Jesus had risen prior to his nocturnal fishing trip.

It is hoped that these simple and direct monologs will provide a personal and enjoyable approach to use in recounting the Easter story so pivotal to the Christian faith.

— Jeffrey B. Snyder

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Zacchaeus

Ha! These people thought they could keep me from seeing the action, did they? Thought they could get even with old Zacchaeus the tax man and keep me from seeing the only interesting event to take place in Jericho since the wall fell? Well, I may be short and they may be able to squeeze me out, but I didn't get to be chief tax collector, or rich, by being stupid. Anyway, this old sycamore tree gives me the best view of all. I can sit way up here and look down on all the rabble. Besides, that supposed miracle worker has to pass this way.

And here he comes now, the man of the hour. Look at the crowd watching him — so much attention, so many hopeful glances. Hard to believe these people can look that way. Wait, there are some faces I'm familiar with. Those Pharisees look like they're sucking persimmons or paying my taxes. But most of the crowd seems to adore him. And they are so quiet. This city is never so quiet.

Here he comes, right under my tree. I knew he would. Hey, what's this? He stopped. Now he's looking up like he knows I'm here. He does, he's looking right at me. What? Come down? You must stay at my house?

Excuse me, Jesus, is it? Do you know who you're talking to, whose house you want to stay at? Do you know what these townsfolk will say? You do? Yeah, I guess you do.

Despite what the crowd thinks of me, this Jesus wants to come to my home. Jesus. Healer of the sick, messenger from God, if you believe the stories, and he's waiting for me. Look at him! He cares about my answer. He's waiting for it. He cares about me. It's in his eyes. He cares for Jericho's chief tax collector.

If this Jesus is who they say he is, then in his eyes, I'm hideously unclean. Yet he chose me. In all my adult

1 life, no one has ever cared about me or valued what I think
2 like he does. This man is not like the others. This man makes
3 me feel well right down to my soul, and I wouldn't even admit
4 I was sick. He might just be who they say, if he's willing to put
5 himself at risk for me and to care for me in front of everyone
6 who despises me. He's rocked this crowd with one simple act
7 of compassion. I want to be like that! I'll show them!

8 Lord, half of what I own, I will give to the poor. And to
9 you, all of you, if there is anyone I have cheated out there, I
10 will pay him four times what I stole. Come with me now, Lord.
11 You are more than welcome in my home — and in my life.

The Samaritan Leper

I left my mountain home and my friends in Samaria years ago to seek my fortune in another land. As a Samaritan, I was never accepted, and instead of getting a fortune, I got sick. I got leprosy, the most feared disease in all the world. The local priest declared me unclean. I was ashamed and alone. I couldn't go home and face my family, so I kept company with other lepers, but I was still the only Samaritan. Always the outsider.

One day Jesus, a powerful healer, came to our village. As he passed I cried out, made brave by my loneliness. "Lord, have mercy on us!" I pleaded, as the other lepers joined in. Jesus told us to go to the priest and walked on. I was confused and disappointed. This was no miracle — just the law. By law, only the priest could say we were well — the same priest who had condemned us.

We went, walking slowly. All at once I felt strange. I was healed! I shouted for joy. All ten of us looked at each other and laughed. We were all healed. I said we should go thank Jesus for the miracle. The others said, "No, go to the priest. It's the law. Only he can say we're clean."

The law. "The law never helped us," I said. Besides, the priest didn't heal us, and I didn't want him telling me what I already knew or what to believe and what to be. "Samaritan!" the others sneered, and hurried away. Alone again, I ran back and fell at Jesus' feet, thanking him for making me clean, for dealing with me personally. He asked why I, a foreigner, was the only one who came back. But I think he knew. I needed to thank him for helping me as a friend when everyone else treated me as a stranger, an enemy. He told me to go home, that I was healed. I went back to Samaria, to my home. Ever since, I have told people about Jesus' act of friendship. No priest has ever declared me clean. I don't need that. I know I am clean and that I will never be alone again. I have Jesus for a friend.

Thomas (Feeding the 5,000)

Excuse me. Jesus, excuse me. It's late and all these people are getting hungry. Let's send them away into the towns. They need to eat, and I, for one, don't want to be out here in the wilds with thousands of hungry, cranky people after dark, if you know where I'm coming from.

Feed them? Whadda ya mean, feed them?! What, I'm supposed to hike into the nearest town and pick up 200 denarii worth of bread? What do we have? Peter? How much food have we got? Yeah, how much? OK, five loaves and two fish. Hardly a feast for . . . Feed them? With five loaves and two small fish?

I don't believe it. Now, of course, I've seen Jesus here do some pretty amazing things in the past, and sure, he sent us out to heal some of the sick, but come on. Before this, we worked with little groups: one, two, ten people maybe. At most, one town at a time. But this? Almost everybody from all the towns within a day's walk is here! They've got us surrounded. Feed them with five loaves and two fish?

It would be different if he were doing it. I'd be comfortable with that. But us? Come on. Half the time we don't even understand what he's saying or what he did until he tells one of those little stories of his. And now he pushes us out in front of thousands of people, make that thousands of hungry, tired, irritable people, and tells us to feed them with . . . with . . . with what, dinner for two?!

Oh, don't give me that look. I know, I know. Have enough faith and we can do anything. But this? What do we do if it doesn't work? At best we'll look stupid. Maybe we'll never be able to show our faces in this region again. But at *worst* — well, I don't even want to think of at worst. Couldn't we just . . . No? Oh, *all right!* I don't believe this. Oh, Peter! . . .

Blind Bartimaeus

Before Jesus came to Jericho I was a poor beggar man, dependent on the kindness of others for my very life. It wasn't my fault I was blinded as a boy, but everyone in town believed I was worthless because I couldn't fend for myself. That would have been bad enough, but worse yet, I believed them and accepted their view of me.

Then Jesus of Nazareth came to town and, in spite of myself, I dared to hope he would give me back my sight. I heard he was a great healer and, better yet, that he often dealt with the lowliest people, the people others ignored — even tax collectors! My heart soared. I had no doubt he could heal me! I knew all the stories about him. But I was so afraid he wouldn't deal with a man called worthless by so many. Despite my fears, I positioned myself at the edge of town along the road I knew he would take. In time I heard people coming — excited people, Jesus' people. When they were close enough, I gathered my courage and shouted, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me!"

Immediately, the crowd surrounded me and demanded that I be silent. They were offended that someone so lowly would dare to speak to so great a man. My fears wrapped around me tighter than the pressing crowd. For a horrible moment I obeyed the crowd and was silent. Then a vision of years of misery to come, of being what people told me I was, filled my head. I rebelled for the first time in my life! I would not believe these people anymore. I would not submit to their idea of what I was! I screamed out in my defiance — screamed out against that crowd as loudly as I could, "Jesus, have mercy on me!"

And he did. Jesus healed my eyes when I asked him. But he did more than that. His actions opened the eyes of my soul, and I saw myself as a real person with value and gifts to offer for the first time since my blinding. From that day to this, I have followed Jesus — followed him through great joys and terrible sorrows. From that day to this, I have not allowed

1 public opinions to tell me what I am or what I should be. Don't
2 you let them tell you, either!

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A Pharisee (Healing on the Sabbath)

Jesus has been so full of himself lately — so confident in his teaching. Arrogant, really. And this healing business . . . quite excessive, if you ask me. He's always upstaging the Pharisees and making us look foolish in front of the common people. He's been a thorn in my side for a long while, but this time he's broken the law!

I'd been looking for a way to stop him, so when I saw that wretch with the withered hand come into the synagogue, I saw my chance. I gathered my friends together, Pharisees all, and we waited for Jesus. Finally Jesus came in and saw the wretch. Just as he started to move toward the man, I spoke up. I asked loudly if it was lawful to cure someone on the Sabbath. He made some sarcastic comment about saving sheep any day and people being more valuable than sheep. When none of us answered, he healed the man in front of my witnesses! And he had the audacity to be angry with us, even though I was in the right! I couldn't have asked for more! I was so delighted I couldn't speak. None of us did. Well, we've got him now. He's broken the law, and we're going to make him pay for the crime.

Some say he did a great and brave thing. Some say Jesus relieved the man's suffering in spite of intense pressure for him to bow to authority. I say that doesn't matter because he broke the law, and the law, right or wrong, is everything. Without it, we Pharisees can't lead the people. They wouldn't follow us without the law. And they won't follow the law unless they're afraid of the consequences of breaking it. Jesus is attempting to remove fear and replace it with odd romantic notions of the world being a better place for those with the courage to make it so. He's making simple people hope for things above their station. So now we'll have to show the common man that no one may disobey the law. I'm going to see to it that Jesus pays for his crime! The people must be afraid!

Mary of Bethany

It was six days before the Passover. Martha and I had prepared a dinner in Jesus' honor. Martha was serving and I was putting away an expensive jar of perfume. The disciples were there too. We were all worried about Jesus. He'd taught us with such wisdom and performed incredible miracles, but the priests disapproved of everything he said and did. We were afraid they meant to condemn him. I heard as much in the village.

As I listened, I was swept with a horrible sense of doom. I looked at Jesus and I knew the council meant to kill him. To kill our savior and that they would succeed! I felt helpless at the thought and desperate to act — to do something to show Jesus, before they murdered him, how we honored him and how much he had come to mean to us.

I ran to him, tears filling my eyes, ran past those men and forced my way to him, still clutching my jar of perfume. As I ran, I realized there was only one thing to do. I could help prepare him for the death I was certain he faced. Oh, what a bitter task!

I took the perfume, a pound of nard, and I poured it over his feet. Its beautiful fragrance filled the room. I unwrapped my hair, heedless of the company, and began to wipe his feet with it. The ointment and my tears mixed as I knelt before him, wiping with shaking hands. I could scarcely see, but I heard the reactions: gasps of surprise, the scraping of chairs pushed away from the table across the hard stone, Martha crying out in surprise. But most of all, I remember clearly hearing Judas' voice above the rest. He shouted, "*Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?*"

Fear rose in me when I heard those hard words. I knew Jesus loved the poor, and I wondered: would Jesus disapprove of me? Grief and anxiety nearly overwhelmed me. Then Jesus

1 spoke. He said, "Leave her alone. Let her keep what is left for
2 the day of burial. You will always have opportunities to help
3 the poor, but you will not always have me." I leaned against
4 him then and wept unashamed, for he affirmed me to the core
5 of my being.

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Judas

Jesus led us into Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. We gathered for dinner at the house of an accommodating stranger, took our places and began to eat. Then Jesus spoke. We expected him to teach us something new during our celebration. Instead, while careful not to look directly at any of us, he said, "One of you will betray me, one of you who is eating with me tonight."

For a long moment, no one spoke. Then in pain and confusion we cried as one, "*Not me, Lord, surely not me!*" Jesus spoke again. He made it clear that this traitor would play a large part in fulfilling the prophecies concerning his death and that the betrayer would have been better off if he had never been born.

I quickly put that strange prediction out of my head. I had too much to do this evening to worry about traitors. I had to force Jesus to throw off this preoccupation with death and take his rightful place as king of all Jerusalem — king of all the world!

So I went to the priests in Jerusalem and offered to take them to Jesus. These fools were looking for a way to capture Jesus, to condemn him for the amazing things he did and said. They weren't blind. They saw, as Peter and I saw, that Jesus was the Messiah and had come to lead Israel as its new king. They couldn't accept it. They wanted to kill Jesus before everyone defected to follow him, and they were more than happy to gather their guards and follow me. I almost laughed. When I confronted Jesus with these disgusting, bloodthirsty old men, he'd have to act, defend himself, crush these silly old men, and lead us all into a new age of glory! I would usher in a new world at Jesus' side.

But now look at me — all alone in this miserable garden. Jesus didn't lift a finger to save himself. He *let* the guards drag him off. This isn't right. They'll murder him if he lets them. I

1
2 led them to him and he . . .
3 *No, oh no. Not me, surely not me?!*
4 This way I've betrayed him . . . I'm the traitor. In Jesus'
5 eyes and in front of the disciples, I've betrayed him! What have
6 I done?
7 *You knew, and you let me do it!*
8 How do I live with this? How do I live *alone* with this shame?
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Peter (Denial)

1 A mob came to put my Lord to death, and I was afraid. I
2 ran. But I didn't go far. I'd sworn I would follow Jesus — follow
3 him into death if need be. My words came back to haunt me. I
4 was ashamed, am ashamed. I followed the crowd from a distance,
5 hanging back like a cringing dog just out of sight. They took
6 him into the home of the high priest. I crept into the courtyard.
7 A fire was lit by the guards who'd taken Jesus. I went over to
8 warm myself. It didn't do any good. I was chilled in my soul
9 and no heat would warm it.

10 From above, in the high priests' public chamber, I could
11 hear the council squabbling over Jesus. Strange accusations
12 were being made by witnesses. They were so eager to condemn
13 him that their testimonies never agreed. But they went on and
14 on, ignoring the discrepancies! Listening to those hateful shouts
15 made me fear for my own life instead of Jesus'. In spite of
16 myself, I kept thinking that if the council could believe such
17 lies against the Messiah, it would be nothing for them to accuse
18 me too!

19 While the priests rejected Jesus as a blasphemer inside, I
20 abandoned him to the crowd outside. There I was, surrounded
21 by strangers. They knew each other well. It was soon clear they
22 thought they knew me, too. I was recognized *three* times by
23 people in the crowd as a follower of Jesus, and *three* times I
24 denied any knowledge of him. In my fear, I swore and cursed,
25 desperately trying to separate myself from Jesus with every
26 breath, every word. Jesus had predicted this. Jesus was right.
27 By dawn I had denied him. I had separated myself from him
28 completely.

29 I ran from the courtyard, just far enough to be out of sight
30 of the hostile crowd and out of earshot of Jesus' accusers. Their
31 shrill curses echoed down the streets and alleys after me. Yet
32 each step seemed to put miles between Jesus and me. *I've* been
33 his faithful servant, *I've* recognized him as the Messiah, *I've*

1 been closer to him than to anyone I've ever known. I've . . .
2 loved him as fiercely as any man can love another. Now, in one
3 night, he's been torn from me — stolen from me by the council
4 and by my own fearful words in the courtyard. He lives, but I
5 can't get near him. I can't help him. I can't even acknowledge
6 him. Oh, why couldn't I have gone with him? Surely suffering
7 with him would be better than losing him this way! *Oh Lord,*
8 *why have I forsaken you?*

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Barabbas

I, Barabbas, am a thief and a murderer, a criminal in the eyes of Rome and the council. I defy them all. I expect to die for it, too. I have stolen from the fat cows that populate this stinking land. And when they tried to stop me, I *killed* one of them. Just yesterday. I don't regret it, either. I only regret getting caught.

My bad luck. But life is mostly bad luck anyway! If I hadn't robbed and killed, I'd have starved in the street and nobody'd care.

Can't say I look forward to hanging from that cross, though, strung up like so much rotting meat and dying slowly in the sun. I am a strong man, but even *I'm* afraid of that! Only a fool wouldn't be, and I'm no fool. Are you?!

There's only one way out of this. The governor, Pilate, allows the locals to pick one prisoner to go free during this holiday. But there's no way *I'll* be chosen. There's a rabbi here, Jesus of Nazareth, up on ridiculous charges. I heard he was set up by the council. A really holy man who preaches peace and love, who changes all the rules and heals on the Sabbath. He scares them to death! I'd like to shake his hand. Anyone who can scare those pompous windbags deserves to be listened to and respected, not pegged to boards. Anyway, *he's* sure to be the one let go. The crowd will see. They'll know he's innocent of council lies. So *I'm* as good as dead. How's it feel listening to a dead man?

What's this? They're calling *my* name. Pilate's asking again. *Me!* They want to release *me!* They're crazy. They want Pilate to crucify the rabbi. Ha, Pilate says they should do it themselves. Oh, they *can't*. Against Jewish law. Phah! Let Rome do the dirty work for you, eh? Cowards, crazy cowards! They'll kill a man who preaches peace and love and let me go, an admitted crook and killer. I won't repent to these scum, either.

Still, I'm free. By the blood of an innocent man, I'm free.



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