

**HE IS NOT HERE!
HE IS RISEN!**

by John B. Wintermute



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He Is Not Here! He Is Risen!

A one-act play for a sunrise service

by JOHN B. WINTERMUTE

CAST OF CHARACTERS*(In order of appearance)*

MINISTER: Hopefully the regular minister of the church, but someone of either sex can play the role.

1ST SEEKER: Any age or sex.

2ND SEEKER: Any age or sex.

Both of the SEEKERS are dressed in the habits of a friar or monk.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The play is written to be performed in the church sanctuary, quite possibly in place of the sermon on a Sunday morning or as an Easter Sunrise Service. It would be especially effective if held inside the church and using the alternate ending — with the congregation marching outside into the Easter sunrise as they continue to hold hands and sing.

It would add to the total effect of the piece if the congregation could stand up, hold hands, and make a gigantic circle about the sanctuary, since any mental or emotional commitment made during the service is strengthened when the people present do something physically.

If it is used as a Sunrise Service it should be carefully timed at a rehearsal, so that the congregation leaves the church and marches outside just as the sun rises.

There are several ways of presenting it.

The tomb should be light enough to be carried on by one person and very simple in construction. One should not strive for realism but simply for a symbol of an "open tomb."

The lighting is equally simple. It may be nonexistent, save for the usual lighting of the sanctuary or it may be lighted by two ordinary 150-watt spotlights placed in front and on either side, but focusing on the faces of the Minister and Seekers as they stand behind the pulpit.

It may be either read or memorized. If it is read, then considerable time should be spent in rehearsing it so that it is read convincingly.

It may be played with the Minister and the Seekers standing behind the pulpit and reading from a script placed upon the pulpit.

However, it must be noted that the first few lines and the last few lines will have to be memorized.

1 **SETTING:** The sanctuary of the church. There are the usual
 2 furnishings of a church — pulpit, communion table or altar,
 3 perhaps a lectern. It is the annual Easter Sunday Morning
 4 Service (or Sunrise Service).

5

6 **AT RISE:** With the MINISTER standing behind the pulpit and
 7 speaking, a crudely built tomb is carried on and placed down
 8 on the level of the congregation.

9

10 **MINISTER:** It was the Christian church which gave birth to
 11 modern drama during the Middle Ages in England. The
 12 first play was an Easter play, acted out by the local parish
 13 priest with the help of some monks, and was presented
 14 on Easter Sunday morning, prior to the mass. A crude
 15 tomb was placed on the level of the congregation. Beside
 16 the tomb was the parish priest or a friar who enacted
 17 the role of an angel. *(The MINISTER leaves the pulpit and*
 18 *goes down to stand beside the tomb.)* Let's pretend that I am
 19 a priest and in this first Easter drama I am playing the
 20 part of the angel who was at the tomb on Easter morning.
 21 *(The 1ST and 2ND SEEKERS come rushing down the center*
 22 *aisle of the church toward the pulpit and tomb.)*

23 **1ST SEEKER:** *(To 2ND SEEKER)* Who will roll away the stone
 24 for us?

25 **2ND SEEKER:** *(Stopping and pointing toward the tomb)* Look,
 26 someone has already rolled it back.

27 **1ST SEEKER:** *(As they continue on down the aisle, the 1ST*
 28 *SEEKER to the 2ND SEEKER)* I wonder who the young
 29 man is standing next to the tomb? *(They arrive at the tomb,*
 30 *and draw back in fear and are trembling from the presence of*
 31 *the ANGEL.)*

32 **2ND SEEKER:** That is not a young man. It's an angel!

33 **MINISTER:** *(The MINISTER speaks to them.)* Whom do you
 34 seek?

35 **1ST SEEKER:** *(Stuttering from fright, he explains his mission*

- 1 to the ANGEL.) **Jesus! We have come to anoint his body**
 2 **for burial.**
- 3 **MINISTER:** **But why are you looking here among the dead**
 4 **for one who is alive? He is not here.**
- 5 **1ST SEEKER:** *(Astonished, uncertain that he has heard correctly)*
 6 **You say he isn't here?**
- 7 **MINISTER:** **He is risen, as he said he would!**
- 8 **2ND SEEKER:** *(Looking about, searching for the Savior)* **Where**
 9 **is here if he isn't here?**
- 10 **MINISTER:** *(Motioning toward the tomb)* **Come look for**
 11 **yourself.** *(The two SEEKERS glance into the crude, make-*
 12 *shift tomb.)*
- 13 **2ND SEEKER:** *(To the 1ST SEEKER)* **You're right! There's no**
 14 **one here!**
- 15 **1ST SEEKER:** *(To the MINISTER)* **Sir, if you have taken his**
 16 **body away, let us know where you have hid it, so that**
 17 **we might go and anoint it.**
- 18 **MINISTER:** **I just finished telling you, he's alive!**
- 19 **2ND SEEKER:** **If he's alive, where is he?**
- 20 **1ST SEEKER:** **Where can we find him?**
- 21 **MINISTER:** **Go tell Peter and the disciples that he has gone**
 22 **before them into Galilee. There they will see him.** *(The*
 23 *MINISTER starts back toward the pulpit, then pauses and turns*
 24 *back to see that the SEEKERS are still standing where he left*
 25 *them.)* **The play is over. You may go and sit down now.**
 26 *(The two SEEKERS remain standing where they are. They are*
 27 *not about to leave for anyone or any reason.)* **Please find**
 28 **yourself a seat somewhere in the sanctuary so that I**
 29 **can continue with the rest of the morning worship**
 30 **service.** *(At this point, the plot takes a twist that was never*
 31 *intended when it was first produced in the medieval church.)*
- 32 **1ST SEEKER:** **But if he's alive, what's he doing in Galilee?**
- 33 **MINISTER:** *(Slowly explaining, as if to little children)* **He's no**
 34 **longer in Galilee. That was almost two thousand years**
 35 **ago that he met his disciples there, as he had promised.**

1 **After that, he ascended into heaven!**

2 **2ND SEEKER:** Well, what's he been doing with his time all
3 **this while he's been in heaven?**

4 **MINISTER:** *(The MINISTER has not expected this turn of events*
5 *and he reacts to the questioning of the SEEKERS in confusion,*
6 *as he retreats behind the safety of his pulpit, and a bit of anger*
7 *creeps into his voice.)* **Listen, this was to be a short, simple**
8 **play, copied after the ones they used to do in church**
9 **during the Middle Ages. So let's not improvise, shall we?**
10 **You've played your parts, and now the show is over.**
11 **Please leave so I can give my Easter sermon.**

12 **1ST SEEKER:** *(Who has followed the MINISTER and stands beside*
13 *him at the pulpit)* **With all respect, good minister, we didn't**
14 **ask to be in this little play of yours. But now that we are**
15 **involved in it . . . well, we'd just like to know how it turns**
16 **out!**

17 **2ND SEEKER:** *(Joining the MINISTER and the 1ST SEEKER*
18 *beside the pulpit, from which area the rest of the play is given)*
19 **Meaning, if Jesus is alive and well, but he isn't here in**
20 **this, his church, on this Easter morning, then where in**
21 **this world is he?**

22 **MINISTER:** As I told you, Jesus isn't in the world anymore.
23 **He ascended into heaven a long time ago.**

24 **1ST SEEKER:** And left us with no one to lend us a helping
25 **hand when we get into trouble? I don't believe it.**

26 **2ND SEEKER:** Surely he must know how desperately we
27 **need him down here on earth . . .**

28 **1ST SEEKER:** . . . What with wars breaking out on every side
29 **all over the face of the earth . . .**

30 **2ND SEEKER:** . . . And folks here at home killing off their
31 **neighbors in anger and hate . . .**

32 **1ST SEEKER:** . . . With over half the world going to bed on
33 **empty stomachs every night of their earthly lives and**
34 **living in ignorance, slavery, and poverty . . .**

35 **2ND SEEKER:** . . . Little children in our own nation going

- 1 hungry or left homeless on our streets . . .
- 2 **MINISTER:** Jesus will return some day, hopefully very soon,
3 with legions of angels. Then he'll straighten out the mess
4 our weaknesses have made possible.
- 5 **1ST SEEKER:** But can't you see, we need Jesus now. We can't
6 postpone hunger and hate and wars and greed until he
7 decides to return with his avenging angels.
- 8 **2ND SEEKER:** *(Very sadly)* If he's gone, then he's of no
9 earthly use to us! No good at all!
- 10 **MINISTER:** He most certainly is! He's your only hope of
11 salvation! What more could you ask?
- 12 **1ST SEEKER:** *(He pauses and turns toward the MINISTER.)* If
13 he's interested in our salvation, then I think it's time for
14 him to start saving us from this mess you acknowledge.
- 15 **MINISTER:** He will! But all in God's good time!
- 16 **1ST SEEKER:** *(Turns to go back down the aisle and leave the*
17 *church.)* No sense staying here if you can't tell us where
18 in this world this Savior is that you keep talking about
19 all the time!
- 20 **2ND SEEKER:** *(Turning to join the 1ST SEEKER)* I came here
21 this morning, as I have for years, hoping to find him.
22 Once again I've drawn a blank, and on Easter Sunday!
- 23 **MINISTER:** *(Shocked by such a confession)* How can you say
24 such a thing?
- 25 **2ND SEEKER:** Well, the church promises us that it can lead
26 us to Jesus, our Savior, doesn't it?
- 27 **MINISTER:** And it can, I promise you it can!
- 28 **2ND SEEKER:** When? Next week? Next year?
- 29 **2ND SEEKER:** *(Also turning back to the pulpit)* If our immortal
30 souls are at stake, as you say they are, then somebody
31 had better show us where we can find him today! This
32 morning!
- 33 **MINISTER:** *(Anxious to reassure)* Don't worry! You're saved.
34 You're heaven bound! One day, praise the Lord, we'll
35 escape all the misery of this world. *(He pauses for their reply.)*

- 1 *When there is none, he asks:)* **Isn't that enough? What more**
 2 **could anyone want?**
- 3 **2ND SEEKER:** We're living in *this* world *this* morning, so we
 4 need someone to save us in *this* world, today!
- 5 **1ST SEEKER:** Otherwise, there's no purpose in coming here.
- 6 **MINISTER:** Now just a minute. You just can't walk out of the
 7 church as if it didn't matter at all.
- 8 **1ST SEEKER:** *(Turning back to face the MINISTER and after a*
 9 *long pause and with a voice filled with sadness)* **Does it matter?**
- 10 **MINISTER:** Does what matter?
- 11 **1ST SEEKER:** The church? *(Pauses.)*
- 12 **2ND SEEKER:** We're waiting for an answer. *(There is another*
 13 *long pause. The silence is embarrassing. Finally the 1ST*
 14 *SEEKER breaks it.)*
- 15 **1ST SEEKER:** *(Earnestly)* At the beginning of the service, we
 16 came here and gathered about this tomb in the front of
 17 the congregation for a burying.
- 18 **2ND SEEKER:** But when we got here, you told us there
 19 wasn't going to be any burial—that the body had
 20 disappeared.
- 21 **1ST SEEKER:** *(Pointing down at the make-believe tomb)* We were
 22 to pretend that this was a tomb . . . *(Looks about the church*
 23 *sadly.)* We've about come to the conclusion that maybe
 24 this church is nothing more than a tomb erected to the
 25 memory of a dead carpenter from Nazareth . . .
- 26 **2ND SEEKER:** . . . Who once made such an impression upon
 27 the poor folk of his day that they remembered him long
 28 after he was crucified, dead, and buried . . .
- 29 **MINISTER:** *(Frustrated)* No, you're wrong! So wrong about it
 30 all! *(He searches for words.)* Look! See, the cross is empty!
 31 He isn't on it!
- 32 **2ND SEEKER:** Yes, we know. He died on the cross . . .
- 33 **1ST SEEKER:** . . . Then they took down his body and buried it
 34 in a tomb in a garden.
- 35 **MINISTER:** *(Starting off slowly as he begins to tell the Easter*

1 *story.*) But when the women and his disciples went to the
 2 tomb, he wasn't there! The body had disappeared! (*He*
 3 *rapidly gains confidence.*) At sunrise on Easter morning, he
 4 arose from the dead to live forever and ever. That was
 5 when the church got started. This church is not a tomb
 6 or memorial but the home of the living Savior!

7 1ST SEEKER: Then why isn't he home when we come calling?

8 MINISTER: His Spirit is here every Sunday! He sends us his
 9 Holy Living Spirit.

10 2ND SEEKER: You mean he's in heaven but he's also here?

11 1ST SEEKER: Among us? This very instant?

12 MINISTER: He's here. Now! Hallelujah!

13 1ST SEEKER: But how can that be?

14 MINISTER: (*Laboriously, as if explaining to children*) Because
 15 he sent his Spirit to be with us in this world!

16 1ST SEEKER: Is that what you mean when you talk about the
 17 Holy Spirit?

18 MINISTER: (*Suddenly excited*) Jesus sends his Holy Spirit to
 19 set things right in our hearts and in this world.

20 2ND SEEKER: But the world's still filled with sinners on
 21 every side . . .

22 1ST SEEKER: . . . Full of evil and hate . . .

23 MINISTER: (*Breaking in*) . . . But if you really believed that his
 24 Holy Spirit is alive and active, all the things you seek
 25 will follow.

26 2ND SEEKER: . . . The hungry, the naked, the sick, the
 27 poverty-stricken, the lonely, the unemployed . . . why
 28 doesn't his Spirit help them?

29 MINISTER: If they'd only believe, he would!

30 2ND SEEKER: . . . All those lonely folks that nobody cares
 31 about one way or the other?

32 1ST SEEKER: . . . The unlovely, unlovable misfits of the
 33 world that we pass by?

34 MINISTER: I tell you, the risen Savior cares for each and
 35 everyone of them. (*Insistent*) His Spirit is here waiting to

- 1 **come into their lives when they call upon his name.**
- 2 **1ST SEEKER:** ... All those homeless, exploited folks in the
3 **world ...**
- 4 **2ND SEEKER:** ... Who are being pushed further down so a
5 **few greedy, grasping people can stand on their shoulders**
6 **and grab all the earthly riches?**
- 7 **MINISTER:** God will punish all those who exploit the poor
8 **and defenseless in the next life, just as he punished the**
9 **rich man who ignored the homeless, hungry, sick Lazarus**
10 **who sat on the sidewalk in front of his palace.**
- 11 **1ST SEEKER:** Punishing the wicked in some future life isn't
12 **helping the homeless and sick when they need help most,**
13 **which is now!**
- 14 **MINISTER:** *(Quietly, but with assurance)* You come here not to
15 **find answers but to worship!**
- 16 **2ND SEEKER:** *(Confused by the MINISTER's change of attitude)*
17 **We came at your invitation, remember?**
- 18 **MINISTER:** *(Shaking his head in sorrow as he remembers)* I had a
19 **beautiful Easter Service planned to inspire this**
20 **congregation. Then I added a little playlet and asked you**
21 **both to help me out. Maybe that was a big mistake.**
- 22 **2ND SEEKER:** *(Hurt. Stressing his innocence)* We came here to
23 **find Jesus who is supposed to have risen from the dead**
24 **on Easter morning.**
- 25 **MINISTER:** *(Making his humble confession of faith)* I personally
26 **believe that on that very first Easter Jesus arose from**
27 **the dead, and that he continues to live on in this world**
28 **and the next, doing the will of God.**
- 29 **1ST SEEKER:** **Prove it so we can all believe!**
- 30 **MINISTER:** *(Honestly and humbly)* It's something that can't
31 **be proven. It's a matter of faith.**
- 32 **1ST SEEKER:** **Maybe you believe that because you're weak.**
- 33 **MINISTER:** **That's right! I need the living Jesus. I need a**
34 **Savior every day, to keep me from making a fool out of**
35 **myself, to see me over the rough spots in life, and through**

1 the dark valleys . . . (*After a very brief pause*) As well as
2 through the sun-lit meadows, and the soft, smooth
3 stretches . . . when I'm sorely tempted to think I can do
4 it all on my own.

5 **2ND SEEKER:** Well, I'm afraid we don't have that kind of
6 blind faith.

7 **MINISTER:** I don't know of any other way to save the world
8 than for us to do his will here on earth as we live out the
9 meaning of our days. He needs all of us, banded together,
10 to get his will done on earth as he's outlined it in heaven.
11 That includes both of you. You may not be responsible
12 for getting the world into the mess it's in. We've all
13 contributed to the evil. But you are definitely
14 responsible, along with everyone else, for getting the
15 world out of this mess.

16 **1ST SEEKER:** But we didn't do anything!

17 **MINISTER:** And that's the reason why you're responsible
18 for the mess we're in — you didn't do anything.

19 **2ND SEEKER:** We didn't come here to be questioned!

20 **MINISTER:** Then are you?

21 **1ST SEEKER:** Are we what?

22 **MINISTER:** As good as you imply? What have you done for
23 the human race?

24 **1ST SEEKER:** (*Sputtering out his reply*) I've brought up a
25 family of four. Put them all through school. I've never
26 been convicted of any crime. Never hurt anyone that I
27 know of . . .

28 **MINISTER:** Probably belonged to the Lions or Rotary.
29 Certainly the P.T.A. when your children were in school.

30 **1ST SEEKER:** I was the president of Rotary.

31 **MINISTER:** How many times have you or I gone beyond the
32 basic goodness required of us as parents, neighbors,
33 citizens, church members? How often have we gone out
34 of our way to help those who live beyond our usual orbit
35 of activity — like those who live homeless on our streets,

1 or in rat-infested tenements in the slums of our city, or
2 hovels in the Third World?

3 **2ND SEEKER:** We take care of our family, our job, our
4 neighborhood, and our church!

5 **MINISTER:** But our neighborhood is the world — not just
6 the street or town where we live, but the world. Our
7 neighbors are all God's children, especially those in need
8 who we can help. How often have you or I gone that far?
9 Done that much? Unless we have, we haven't been very
10 good. There's one thing I do know about Easter which is
11 not a matter of faith but a matter of history, of fact! When
12 the women and these disciples awoke on that first Easter,
13 they were filled with despair. Their dreams were buried
14 in a tomb with the body of Jesus. They no longer had any
15 great goal in life, no Kingdom of God to labor for
16 throughout their life's span! But the women left that
17 garden where the tomb was located with a renewed and
18 bright hope for the future. Their spirits had been set on
19 fire by something or someone at that tomb, and they spent
20 the rest of their earthly life fulfilling the goals and
21 ambitions which Jesus had preached and practiced while
22 he was among them in the flesh. Whether they knew it
23 or not, they had found the physical body of the
24 resurrected Jesus and it was them! The disciples were
25 all set to throw in the towel and give up their dream of
26 the Kingdom of God — a Kingdom marked by love and
27 compassion. They were all set to return to Nazareth and
28 their former jobs as fishermen. But something happened.
29 Something or someone transformed them into the body
30 of the risen Lord and Savior. That's what actually
31 happened on that first Easter. The disciples became the
32 resurrected physical body of the risen Christ in the world
33 in which they lived. They carried on his earthly ministry
34 of compassion and concern. They were his feet that
35 carried them to where they were needed. They were his



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