

REGRETS AND REDEMPTION

by Margaret Rose Fisher



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Regrets and Redemption

Monologs for the Lenten season

by Margaret Rose Fisher

PRODUCTION NOTES

Regrets and Redemption is a dramatic work consisting of seven monologs. They may be used on consecutive Lenten weeks plus a Holy Week service, or presented all at once.

The titles are for the convenience of the players, and do not necessarily have to be revealed to the audience.

The setting of each piece in *Regrets and Redemption* is the person's home, with the exception of the Beggar Woman and Judas, who are both on a street in Jerusalem. The time is evening. If possible, the lights should be dimmed more with each piece — except, of course, for a light on the actor! If the play is done as a single presentation, an effective method of staging is to have two benches, one to the left and one to the right of the playing area, with a light for each bench. As a character finishes his or her monolog, his/her light fades to a blackout. The other light then comes up to reveal the next character on the opposite bench. If only one bench is used, music may be played while actors enter and exit during the blackout. The actors may move around the area of the bench as their piece requires. Their movements should be simple to keep the emphasis on their words. The minister or a narrator should announce each character's name before his/her light comes up unless printed programs are used.

COSTUME NOTES

Costumes may be historical or contemporary. Pilate's wife should be the only one in bright colors, as those dyes were rare and costly. Orange was not available at all, and purple was so expensive that it was worn only by royalty. The upper class would often indicate their wealth by a stripe or fringe of purple on their garments. The other characters should wear dark clothing with a rough texture, as the fabric would have been linen or wool. Until the invention of the cotton gin, removing the seeds from cotton bolls was such a tedious process that only the rich wore cotton garments. The only exception might have been the head coverings, which can be softer.

If historical costumes are used, be aware that most of the characters are in their homes. Thus they would be wearing tunics over loosed leggings. These tunics served as undershirts beneath the robes or togas worn in public. Everyone wore sandals. Indoors the men removed their kaffiyeh

headdresses (cloth draped over the head and held in place by a cord wound around the head). Jewish women covered their hair completely at all times, since only their husbands were allowed to see it.

If contemporary clothes are used, avoid designer names, corporate slogans, etc. Women should wear dresses or skirts.

The centurion is off-duty and not in uniform. For contemporary dress, he should wear casual clothes that reflect his military outlook. He is a true professional who has no need to impress others by his attire.

The mother of James and John should look a bit dowdy and frumpy. If contemporary clothing is worn, she could wear a flowered dress with sturdy, practical shoes. If she is doing housework while she talks, she could wear an apron.

The maidservant of Caiaphas should be in plain clothing suited to her status as a domestic. In contemporary clothes she should wear a housekeeper's uniform consisting of a simple black dress, white apron, and black soft-soled shoes.

The beggar woman would be dressed in ragged, dirty-looking clothing. For contemporary dress she should be a "bag lady," wearing layers of clothing because she has no place to store them.

The wife of Pontius Pilate is the only woman whose hair would not be covered when in historical costume. She should dress in brighter colors and more expensive fabrics than the other characters. Her contemporary clothing would be a designer outfit with tasteful jewelry.

Judas would be dressed in the same style as the other disciples, but slightly better. For contemporary dress, he should wear an outfit that is on the cutting edge of fashion.

Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, should wear the same traditional clothing as the other Jewish women. However, she would have some little extra touch, such as a bit of embroidery, due to her artistic nature. In contemporary costume she should wear soft, flowing clothes that give her an ethereal appearance.

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Assignments

The Centurion of Capernaum

Approximate playing time: 6 1/2 minutes

(This character is the one mentioned in Matthew 8:5–13 and Luke 7:1–10. The rank of centurion has no modern equivalent. He commanded a group of one hundred soldiers [a century]. Although he was an officer, his rank was not one that was acquired by promotion; rather, it was a direct appointment by the emperor and was therefore of high status. His age should be late twenties to early forties. He should be vigorous and athletic.)

CENTURION: I'm glad I wasn't there. I thank the God of Israel that my century isn't stationed in Jerusalem. It would have been my assignment to execute the man who saved Fidelius. And I would have carried out that assignment. The Roman army deals swiftly and efficiently with any soldier who fails to follow orders swiftly and efficiently. That's never been a problem for me until recently. I knew my place in the world, my position in society. I was a Roman citizen. I was a professional soldier, a centurion, appointed by the emperor himself. I was a member of the mightiest army in the world. In my home I was husband, father, and master. I had all the answers, and I questioned nothing.

Then I was sent to Israel. At first I despised it, as all Romans do. This country is a land of extremes: lush green oases surrounded by desert wastelands. Israel's value to Rome is its position. The emperor wants it mostly because it's a route to other conquered territories, such as Egypt. In that sense, Israel is extremely valuable. So it will always be controlled by a stronger nation. It might as well be Rome. Our presence keeps other invaders at bay. If these yokels were sophisticated enough to understand this, they would stop rebelling and enjoy the benefits of being part of the Roman Empire. Since they're not,

everything we do to maintain our control is justified. It's for their own good, even if they can't see that.

Typical Roman thinking from a typical Roman officer. That condescending attitude is standard issue in the army. Every uniform comes complete with a sneer. I wore them both proudly. But gradually I began to change. I noticed that the desert has a harsh kind of beauty, if you only look for it. The sunsets are magnificent. And after it rains, thousands of flowers bloom — but only for a few hours. It's an incredible sight, and more precious because it's so fleeting. And the people are as extreme as their land. It's a nation of villains and visionaries, prostitutes and prophets. Sometimes it's hard to tell which is which! But even the scoundrels are fiercely loyal to Israel, even if they don't observe the religious laws. I slowly began to admire them. I decided to keep the local elders apprised of my actions — simply as a courtesy, you understand. And in turn, the elders started to offer me advice, tentatively at first, and then with more confidence, when they realized I would actually listen. Eventually we became ... friendly. Not friends — I'll never be invited to their homes. But they see me as a person, rather than just another contemptible Roman. My fellow Romans call me "Jew-lover." I tell them that the Jews would be easier to govern if treated with respect, but their minds are closed. They still wear their standard issue sneers.

So now I don't fit in anywhere — not with the Romans, and not with the Jews. I have a sworn duty to Rome, yet I'm drawn to the God of Israel. But a Roman can't become a Jew. Besides, I'd never remember all those laws! If it were only possible to worship the Lord without observing those laws ... In the kingdom of heaven, could there be a small corner for a Roman centurion?

Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed a new commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

1 Maybe I have a chance for salvation after all. Although
 2 when you think about it, that commandment is harder to
 3 follow than all the rules of the temple. To love those who
 4 are unlovable, those who despise you ... it's extremely
 5 difficult. The only people I can swear I truly love to that
 6 extent are my wife and children — and Fidelius.

7 Fidelius is my slave, but in some ways he's closer to me
 8 than even my wife. His father served my father; we grew
 9 up together. In a sense we're brothers. He's tended to my
 10 needs for my entire life. He's accompanied me into battle.
 11 The two of us have experienced things my wife could
 12 never imagine. He knows the way I think; he understands
 13 my moods. He shares my memories.

14 When he became ill, I summoned the best physicians.
 15 They could do nothing. I've seen men killed in battle
 16 countless times, but this sort of slow, agonized dying is
 17 different. For the first time I prayed to the God of Israel:
 18 please, either heal his illness, or end his suffering.
 19 Suddenly word came that Jesus of Nazareth was here in
 20 Capernaum. If the stories about him were true, he could
 21 save Fidelius. Was this God's response to my prayer? I
 22 went to Jesus for help. I risked my reputation, my career,
 23 and my future, but Fidelius was cured.

24 My faith is new, and at times uncertain. I dared to ask
 25 for a miracle, but I didn't dare ask him to my home. It
 26 was for his protection as well as my own. We were both
 27 in enough trouble as it was. When Jesus ate with tax
 28 collectors, at least they were Jews. If he fraternized
 29 with a Roman officer, he would have been crucified! *(He*
 30 *uses this sentence as a figure of speech, then realizes it is the*
 31 *literal truth.)*

32 It seems my caution made no difference. Just as all
 33 roads lead to Rome, his every action took him closer to a
 34 cross. Perhaps he, too, had an assignment to carry out.
 35 I'm just glad I wasn't there to help him complete it.

A Foolish Woman

The Mother of James and John

Approximate playing time: 3 minutes

(This character is the middle-aged wife of Zebedee [the fisherman] and is one of the women who traveled with the disciples. She is uneducated and unsophisticated, but she is warm and good-hearted. The incident she refers to is described in Matthew 20:20–24.)

JAMES AND JOHN'S MOTHER: Jesus used to call me “foolish woman,” but I didn’t mind. He wasn’t annoyed or impatient with me. He knew most times I was just saying out loud what the others were thinking. They were afraid of looking foolish, but it didn’t bother me a bit. Jesus would tell a story, and I would say, “Teacher, I don’t understand.” So he would tell another story. Usually I didn’t understand that one either, to be honest. I remember them all, though. Once everything settles down, I’m going to think long and hard about them. I’ll figure them out eventually.

It was a funny thing about Jesus. He almost never gave you a straight answer. Part of that was because there were informants hanging around who would run right to the temple and repeat everything Jesus said. I bet they didn’t understand his stories any better than I did. But I also think maybe Jesus wanted us to work things out for ourselves. After all, if a thing’s just handed to you, you don’t appreciate it the way you do something you’ve struggled for. Sometimes it was hard to be patient, though.

I got impatient one time and asked Jesus something that I’m a bit ashamed of now. I didn’t mean it the way it sounded. I asked him to promise that my two sons would sit on either side of him in his kingdom. The others got angry with James and John when they

1 should have been angry with me. I guess they thought I
2 was just a foolish woman who didn't know any better.
3 They didn't understand what I really meant. I'm not
4 good at explaining things. Jesus loved us all, but he had
5 a special closeness with John. I always assumed that
6 John would be at his side in Paradise. I just wanted to
7 make sure that James would be there too. I was just ...
8 being a mother. Jesus scolded me, but he wasn't angry.
9 Just sad. The others had all been thinking about the
10 same thing. They were upset because I got my request
11 in before they did. It must have hurt Jesus to hear us
12 squabbling over something so petty. He had bigger
13 things on his mind. He even told us in a roundabout
14 way what was going to happen, but none of us figured
15 it out in time.

16 Now we've got all the time in the world to figure
17 things out. My son John says that Jesus took all our sins
18 upon himself, and that's why he died like that. But it's
19 so confusing. If salvation is just handed to us, how can
20 we appreciate it the way we would if we had to work for
21 it? I don't understand, but then again I'm just a foolish
22 woman.

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Those Galileans

The Maidservant of Caiaphas

Approximate playing time: 3 minutes

(This woman can be of any age. As a servant of the high priest, she has been at the top of the "pecking order" of Jerusalem servants, and has put on airs accordingly. She is terrified of any change in her status, and angry at those who caused the upheaval.)

MAIDSERVANT: From now on I'm going to treat Galileans like lepers. If I see one, I'm going to run the other way. They should all be banned from Jerusalem. That group of Galileans was nothing but trouble. The nerve of them, causing such chaos! This is the holy city. My master is the high priest, the most revered man in all of Israel. But that carpenter came to the temple with his gang of country bumpkins and acted like he owned the place! Caiaphas should have had him arrested on the spot. But he called the council together to deliberate first. These men of learning have to debate every little thing. Luckily that Jesus fellow didn't have sense enough to leave town while he had the chance. He's gone now, that's for sure. There's no coming back from Golgotha. The rest of them are hiding like cockroaches.

My master was far too lenient with those lawbreakers. He should have thrown every last one of them in prison. But he says they'll be lost without their leader, that it's not worth the effort to round them up. He could have gotten most of them the other night. One Galilean was actually in our courtyard. He tried to pretend he wasn't one of them, but you can't miss that accent. I pointed him out to the guards, but they wouldn't lift a finger. They said their orders were to stop anyone who tried to rescue the ringleader. They weren't about to arrest someone else just because he

1 was a Galilean. They couldn't see the danger.

2 Caiaphas doesn't see the danger, either. He thinks it's
3 all over now. He's a priest. He doesn't walk among the
4 townspeople as I do; he doesn't hear their whispers.
5 When the earth trembled after Jesus died, they began to
6 believe he was the Son of God. He converted more
7 people after his death than he did while he was alive!
8 My master doesn't see that his authority is being
9 eroded, that people are beginning to doubt him. He
10 doesn't see that when the temple curtain rips from top
11 to bottom, some people might think that God is
12 displeased with the high priest!

13 I wish those Galileans had never come to Jerusalem.
14 Everything was fine until they showed up. Now it's all
15 changed. Nothing will ever be the same. The
16 earthquake is over, but the ground is still shifting
17 under my feet. Before that Jesus came, Caiaphas was
18 esteemed. People were in awe of him. No one would
19 ever have criticized his actions. No one would ever have
20 wondered if he was the true spiritual leader of Israel.
21 No one would have dared to question the decisions of
22 the high priest ... not even his maidservant.

Tests

A Beggar Woman

Approximate playing time: 4 minutes

(This character's disability has not been specified so that the actress can decide how to portray it. It should be severe enough that she would be unable to work. It could be cerebral palsy, a stroke, etc. Depending on the disability chosen, the line "I've been like this since I was three" [which appears twice — once at the beginning and once at the end] may need to be adjusted to the appropriate age. She is fiercely proud of her independence. Her anger at her father's rejection gives her the strength to survive. She should be in her late-teens to mid-thirties.)

BEGGAR WOMAN: Before you ask — I've been like this since I was three. I don't know exactly how it happened, but I do know my father was furious. My earliest memories are of him loudly demanding to know why God had punished him so. Him, not me. It never occurred to him that maybe my disability wasn't a punishment, but a test. If this was God's way of testing my father, I assure you he failed. It's difficult enough to be like this, but I was reminded daily that I was a burden — a curse, even. I'm sure he was greatly relieved to be rid of me.

The ironic thing is that I'm better off than a lot of women. I shudder to think what kind of husband my father would have chosen for me if I hadn't been "deformed." Instead I'm here in Jerusalem, answering to no one. My fellow beggars are my family now. We watch out for each other, care for each other. I'm better loved as a beggar than I was as a daughter. And when people here pity me, they pay for the privilege of feeling superior.

There's an art to begging. You need to ask the right person at the right moment. It helps to have a good spot. I have one of the best, right outside the temple. I serve a very useful function. The rich give money to me so that

1 everyone will admire them. They get the congratulations,
2 I get the coins. It's a win-win situation. Everybody's happy.

3 Except on the day that Jesus came to the temple. I've
4 never seen the bigwigs so angry. It was days before they
5 were in a charitable mood again. It was worth the lost
6 income, though, to see those scoundrels humiliated. I'd
7 always heard Jesus was a man who preached peace, but
8 he sure read them the riot act! It's no wonder they
9 decided he was too dangerous to live.

10 Does it surprise you that I've heard of Jesus? Don't
11 forget that the temple is at the center of everything. The
12 priests get better information than the Romans. And we
13 beggars might as well be invisible, as far as they're
14 concerned. They say things in front of us that they
15 wouldn't tell their wives. So I knew about Jesus and his
16 miracles some time ago.

17 I can guess what you're thinking. If I knew about the
18 miracles, why didn't I ask Jesus to heal me? Heal me for
19 what? I've been like this since I was three. I've had no
20 training in even the most basic household tasks. No man
21 would want an unskilled wife. Where would I go? To my
22 father's house? No thank you! I don't want to be loved
23 because I'm perfect. I want to be loved because I'm a
24 person. If everyone was like Jesus, maybe I would have
25 asked for healing a long time ago. But if everyone was like
26 Jesus, I would be valued just as I am.

27 Well, enough of that. I don't have time for dreams. I
28 need to get back to work. People are feeling guilty about
29 the death of Jesus, so business should be good for the next
30 several days. They got their crucifixion, I get the coins. It's
31 a win-win situation. The only one who lost ... was Jesus.
32 Unless we all lost. Who knows? Maybe God sent this Jesus
33 as a test. I'm just not sure who was being tested. Maybe we
34 all were. I wonder how many of us passed.

35

The Hardest Words

The Wife of Pontius Pilate

Approximate playing time: 4 1/2 minutes

(This character is the perfect politician's wife: diplomatic and gracious in public, and a trusted adviser in private. Pilate married her for her family connections. She is a shrewd observer of the political arena. She is his intellectual equal, and considers herself a partner in his career.)

PILATE'S WIFE: My husband claims that the hardest words to say are "I was wrong and you were right." That must be true, since he's never said them. In fairness to him, as governor any apology would be taken as a sign of weakness. The slightest hint of weakness, and his enemies would attack like rabid hyenas.

Everyone thinks it must be wonderful to be the governor. The fools have no idea what it's really like. He's caught in the middle between Rome and Israel. Rome wants the territory under control, no matter what it takes. The Jews want to be free, no matter what it takes. Are you beginning to see the problem? My husband crushes one rebellion, and ten more spring up. Rome expects him to rule with a firm hand, then questions the need for so many crucifixions. Pontius has explained again and again that those Jewish rebels are fanatics. They can't be bought off like a Roman senator. Their religion does not compromise. They demand liberty or death, so my husband obliges them. But every death kills a small piece of his heart. Eventually he'll become as heartless as they accuse him of being.

Not every Jew is so incorruptible, of course. Herod's palace is buzzing with intrigue. I'd be very cautious about drinking the wine in that household. Herodias doesn't appreciate the precariousness of her situation.



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