



Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?



Good Friday Service

**Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?
*A Dramatic Reading in Story and Song***

(The service will proceed without announcements)

Instrumental Prelude

Leader: Welcome and Opening Prayer

Hymn CP 192 *(verse 1)*

Were You There When They Crucified My Lord

Reading: The Scientific Death of Jesus

The Collect:

Almighty God, look graciously, we pray, on this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Leader:

“Many people were present when our Lord was crucified on this day. You will hear from some of them this morning. Now, shall we begin...

“John, were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

John:

“Yes, I was there. Jesus and I were close friends, and I was there the whole time. At the Passover meal we sat next to each other, and I received from him the bread and the wine. “This is my body,” he said. And “This is my blood.” Beautiful words and I realize what they meant. I listened with disbelief and dismay when Jesus said one of us would betray him. And when he said, “Tonight you will all desert me” I just couldn’t believe him. We were his close followers. We loved him. We wouldn’t desert him! When we came to the Garden of Gethsemane afterwards, Jesus chose me, along with Peter and my brother James to go with him, further into the garden, where he prayed to his Father. I am ashamed to say that I fell asleep, like the other two. Not just once. Three times. Jesus’ words “Couldn’t you stay awake with me one hour?” have haunted me. It’s as if they are burned into my heart”.

Leader: “I hear that Peter was there too...”

Peter:

“I was there, though there are some parts I’d like to forget. Like my rash words, “Maybe the others will desert you, Lord, but not me”. I said that very confidently. And when Jesus turned to me and said, “Before the rooster crows you will deny me three times,” I was shocked. And hurt. Why would he say a thing like that?

In the Garden of Gethsemane, I was all zeal and bravado. I felt like I could protect Jesus from the clubs and swords of the crowd that showed up among the olive trees. I bravely slipped out my sword and cut off the ear of the priest’s servant. It was a stupid, impulsive thing to do.

But it’s my denial of Jesus that torments me. There at that courtyard fire I couldn’t even admit to the maid, “Yes, I know Jesus. He’s my friend. I’m his follower.” Instead, I said, “No, I don’t know the man.”

Why couldn’t I identify with him? Why couldn’t I stand up for Jesus when he was facing the jeering crowds?

The interrogation? Now I know how people feel when they wish they could go back and live some part of their lives over again. I wish I could have another chance. Do it better. Now, whenever I hear a rooster crow, I think to myself, I couldn’t have been more faithless. More cowardly...”

Hymn CP 192 (verse 2)

Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?

Judas:

“They call me Judas, and I was hoping you wouldn’t ask if I was there. I was hoping that my betrayal would be something you wouldn’t want to hear about. No, I did not see Jesus crucified. But I was there, eating the Passover meal with Christ, after I had already agreed to betray him. I left the dinner early to join those with whom I was collaborating. Together we came to the Garden of Gethsemane, me and the servant of the high priests and the elders, the police, a noisy mob with clubs and swords. The thirty silver coins the priests and elders had given me to

do this were in my pocket and now it was time for me to deliver. And I did. I delivered Jesus into their hands. We'd agreed that I'd identify him with a kiss. I'm not proud of that.

Afterwards, those coins burned a tunnel in my soul. I knew it was blood money. I knew I had done a dastardly thing. But what's done cannot be undone..."

Hymn CP 192 (verse 3)

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Leader: "And Caiaphas, were you there...?"

Caiaphas:

"Of course I was there. It was my duty to do something about the man who was defying all our traditions and the authority of the temple. I was the one who told everyone, "It's better that one man should die for the people", though I realize that sometimes language is double-edged, and you might understand those words differently from me – and he was too good to be true!

You see, I firmly believe that sometimes the end justifies the means, and sometimes you have to manipulate a mob to get a necessary thing done, even if it's not so pleasant. When we interrogated Jesus, he was not cooperative. And in my opinion, he was inexcusably blasphemous too. That sort of thing can't be tolerated.

I did my best to get credible witnesses whose stories would indict him. That didn't work too well. So, I appealed to the people's adherence to religious tradition. I worked with their emotions till they yelled out, as I hoped they would: "Crucify him!"

Herod:

"I am Herod, King of the Jews, and yes – I was there. Not at the crucifixion exactly. But when I learned of Jesus, he was already a doomed man. I had always wanted to see him, this Jew whose birth scared my predecessor so badly that he had scores of baby boys killed to get rid of a possible rival. Well, it failed - he didn't know that Jesus was safe in Egypt.

Jesus had attracted a following, and that interested me. I'd heard about the signs and wonders he performed, and the prospect of seeing him perform a miracle intrigued me. But he wouldn't perform - wouldn't even answer my questions. A man in my position wants compliance. On the spot. This man did not comply.

Well, as I said, he was doomed in any case. Was I being cynical, putting that royal velvet robe around his shoulder? I suppose so. And I didn't stop the soldiers from taunting and abusing him. Soldiers are a rough lot.

They take their pleasure where they can. The crucifixion took place, as scheduled, I hear. I didn't give it much further thought."

Leader: "I understand that Pontius Pilate was there as well...?"

Pilate:

"I wish I hadn't been there. Really, you know, I wanted nothing to do with any of it. I realized right away this Jesus was not a criminal. He wasn't evil and he certainly didn't deserve to die.

Personally, I would have liked to let him go. My wife begged me not to get involved.

I didn't care, particularly, what happened to him, but I really didn't want to be involved in such dirty politics. I wish the high priest and his gang could have handled it themselves – any way they wanted to. But they wanted nothing short of blood. I quickly understood that. And they needed my authority to do it officially.

It was that threat, I guess, that persuaded me: "If you don't do it, you won't be the emperor's friend any longer", they said. A psyched-up crowd can exert unbelievable pressure. So, you could say it was political expediency that made me hand Jesus over to be crucified. Who wants to lose a secure job?

And yes, it's true that I said, "What is truth?" Said it cynically I suppose. But I want to remind you that I tried to prevent his death. When they asked me to set a prisoner free, like every year, in honour of the holy day, I was hoping they'd come to their senses and choose Jesus of Nazareth. I didn't think much of that volatile, frenzied crowd when they chose Barabbas. So, in the end, it was the rabble that decided it, you might say. And that bit about me washing my hands. If I told you I

woke up night after night, after the crucifixion, dreaming I was washing my hands to remove the blood, you'd understand the guilt and misery I have lived with. If I've learned anything from that whole unfortunate business, it's this: It's no use trying to weasel out of taking responsibility for your decisions. It doesn't work!"

Hymn CP 192 (verse 4)

Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?

Roman Soldier:

"I was closer than anyone. You can't crucify a condemned man without touching his body. You hear his breathing, smell the sweat, and try not to see the fear in his eyes. Except in this case, it wasn't so much fear as compassion that I sensed as I did the ugly thing - drove the nails through his hands and feet.

Someone has to do the dirty work and you can't blame our unit for throwing dice for the dying man's clothes. Our pay isn't so good that it doesn't need to be topped up a bit. And what would you expect us to do while waiting for a man to die? Sometimes death is long in coming.

I was following orders. It wasn't my idea. Not my choice. You understand that don't you? I was just following orders..."

Leader: "Apparently there was a man called Simon of Cyrene there as well..."

Simon:

"It was by chance that I was there. I saw this procession winding out of the city and I knew it was probably another crucifixion. I saw a man struggling with his cross. I always thought it was going too far to make a condemned man carry his own cross. "He's not going to make it", I thought to myself, and then, before I knew what was happening, someone was yelling at me and someone grabbed me and someone else laid that wooden cross on my shoulders, and suddenly I found myself carrying Jesus' cross for him.

So, I've had the experience of carrying a cross not meant for me. But thinking about it later, I believe that cross was meant for me, and I've become convinced – this may sound odd to you – that I was given an

opportunity, a chance to do something gracious and good. I've never regretted it. It changed my life."

Hymn CP 192 (verse 5)

Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?

Leader: "Mary, mother of Jesus, were you there...?"

Mary:

"I was there. I was always there, it seems. I was there at his birth, giving him birth. I was there in Jerusalem when he scared Joseph and me almost to death by disappearing. Afterwards I thought about his words, "I must be in my Father's house". He was a rather thoughtful twelve-year old. Later he used to say, "I must be about my Father's business". And he wasn't talking about the carpentry.

Yes, I was there when my son died, and I don't have words to describe the pain. Maybe if you're a mother you can imagine it. I thought of that old man, Simon, who was in the temple when Joseph and I first brought Jesus there with our offering. "A sword will pierce your heart", the old man said. I didn't know what he meant. I was so happy and proud of our new son.

One of the last things Jesus did was to tell his friend John to look after me. "There is your mother", he told John. And then he said to me, "There is your son". He was always compassionate like that, always thinking about the other person. And so he died. I wasn't left without a family, but my heart was torn with a terrible sorrow".

Leader: "I heard that other prisoners were there with Jesus - Barabbas and two convicts..."

Barabbas:

"My name is Barabbas, and I was there. For me it meant, literally, my life! When Pilate asked the crowd which of us they wanted freed, me or Jesus, I naturally expected them to say Jesus. He was better known than me. Everyone had heard about Jesus. Me, on the other hand, I'm a nobody, just a petty criminal. When they yelled my name, "Barabbas!

Give us Barabbas!” I was stunned. That day I walked away, a free man. And Jesus was crucified. For me.”

1st Convict:

“They crucified me on the same day, right next to him. There was a third guy, too. Him and me, we were the scum, you might say. We were criminals and we deserved to die.”

2nd Convict:

“I was hung on a cross as well, and I taunted Jesus, dared him to get us all down from the cross. “If you are the Messiah, why don’t you save all three of us from death?” I asked.

1st Convict:

“But I could tell Jesus was not like us. Maybe he was the son of God, like he claimed. So I said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom”. And he turned and blessed me just by looking my way. He said, “Truly I say, today you will be with me in Paradise”.

Centurion:

“I was the Centurion at the crucifixion. I was in charge of the dirty work. But let me tell you something. When I heard his last words and when I saw the way he died, there was no doubt in my mind. I thought “This man was the Son of God. That’s who we executed that day – the Son of God”

Hymn CP 192 (verse 6)

Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?

Joseph:

“Hi. I am Joseph from Arimathea, and no, I wasn’t there. Not at the crucifixion. But when it was discussed in council, those endless discussions about how to get rid of this troublesome person, I was against their suggestions. This was not a criminal we were dealing with. I knew he threatened our leaders with this authoritative teaching and his popularity with crowds, but to execute him – that was wrong. Well, they didn’t listen to me. Maybe I didn’t speak boldly enough.

That night, after Jesus died on that terrible cross, I was the one who took down his body. I guessed that there probably wasn't a tomb ready for him, so I had decided to lay him in my tomb. I brought a length of linen and wrapped him in it. It was dark by then, and so Nicodemus agreed to come with me. Both of us were believers, I might as well tell you. Our faith in Jesus was new and not very bold. This burial was something we did for him. But it's so little when I think of what he did for us. For me. "Surely he was wounded for my transgressions, and by his wounds and bruises, I am healed."

Jerusalem Resident:

"I was there. I live in Jerusalem and sometimes we'd follow the procession when there was to be an execution. You may consider that morbid. Cruel. But life was rough, and we saw all of it. That day the crowd was large and restless, the procession long, and I'd heard that one of the condemned was that Jesus of Nazareth, the one they called the Healer. The Teacher. I wasn't surprised they were crucifying him. Our elders and priests didn't support him. I think they were jealous of him just because he attracted the crowds. He was especially popular with the sick and the poor. That sort were always hanging around him when he came to Jerusalem.

As I watched him carry that heavy cross, I thought of all the burdens I've borne – and let me tell you, I've borne plenty. Children who are wayward. My husband unable to find ways of earning enough to keep us fed. And always that feeling of not being good enough. Of having failed. All those sacrifices I've carried to the temple. Were they ever enough?

Above Jesus' cross I read the words, "King of the Jews". I don't know who put them there, but I thought it was a cruel irony. You don't crucify a king! You honour him! I stayed there a long while watching. Six or seven times I decided I couldn't bear it anymore, and I turned to go. But just as I began to leave, Jesus spoke. I couldn't always make out his words, but I remember when he said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing".

I felt included in that prayer. I felt forgiven. The burdens I'd been carrying around seemed not quite so important. Maybe I could get free of them after all. As I stood watch at his cross, my eyes filled with tears and my heart overflowed with love and with gratitude. It was like nothing else I'd ever experienced."

SILENCE

Congregation Stand and Sing (unannounced):
Hymn CP 386 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

The congregation is invited to approach the cross and leave their nails in a basket at the foot of the cross.

Congregation Stand and Sing (unannounced):
The Old Rugged Cross

On a hill far away stood an old, rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame.
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best,
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

Chorus:
So, I'll cherish the old, rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down.
I will cling to the old, rugged cross,
And exchange it someday for a crown.

Oh, that old, rugged cross, so despised by the world,
Has a wondrous attraction for me.
For the dear Lamb of God left His glory above,
To bear it to dark Calvary. (*Chorus*)

In the old, rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,
Such a wonderful beauty I see.
For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,
To pardon and sanctify me. (*Chorus*)

To the old, rugged cross I will ever be true,
Its shame and reproach gladly bear.
Then He'll call me some day to my home far way,
Where His glory forever I'll share. (*Chorus*)

Chorus:

*So, I'll cherish the old, rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down.
I will cling to the old, rugged cross,
And exchange it someday for a crown.*

Closing: Instrumental Music

Leader: Blessing

