

Good Friday Drama in 12 parts

Voices:

Narrator, as a courtroom prosecutor

1. John
2. Peter
3. Elder (Judas' story)
4. Caiaphas
5. Pilate
6. Roman Soldier
7. Simon of Cyrene
8. Mary, Mother of God
9. Barabbas
10. Centurion
11. Joseph of Arimathea
12. Resident of Jerusalem

Set:

Table and chair with a mic as witness stand. Binder with script on a book stand. Wooden cross prominent at the front of the church. Drum and drummer seated with the choir. Narrator as prosecutor wearing a mic pack and academic gown.

Narrator: We continue with these proceedings to better understand the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. I'll begin by calling John to the stand.

A steady military beat on the drum as John walks forward and takes his seat in the witness stand

Narrator: John, were you there when they crucified our Lord?

John: Yes, I was there.

Jesus and I had been close friends the whole time. I sat next to him at the Passover meal and he gave me the bread and the wine. "This is my body" "This is my blood" he said. I didn't really understand, but I will never forget. But then Jesus said that one of us would betray him. And then he said, "tonight you will all desert me". I just couldn't believe it – we loved him. We would never leave him!

After dinner, we went to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus chose me and Peter and James to go further into the garden to pray. But I fell asleep. I think we all did. Jesus asked, “couldn’t you stay awake with me one hour?” and we failed him. It haunts me still.

Narrator: Thank-you John, you may step down. I call Peter to the stand.

A steady military beat pounds on the drum as John returns to his seat and Peter comes forward.

Narrator: Peter, where were you when they nailed our Saviour to the cross?

Peter: I was there. Well, sort of. I was there for parts of it until I fled in fear. Jesus was right when he said I would deny him three times.

I was in the Garden. I was all zeal and bravado. I felt like I could protect Jesus from the clubs and swords of the soldiers. I pulled out my own sword and cut off the ear of the priest’s servant. What a thing to do.

My denial of Jesus torments me. It still hurts. I was standing near the fire in the courtyard and they asked me if I was one of his disciples. They recognized my northern accent, you see. But I kept saying that I did not know him. I wish I had stood up for him. I wish I hadn’t left him. I wish I could go back and do it over again. The sounds of the rooster in the morning – I think that will always haunt me.

Narrator: Thank-you Peter. I call the Elder to the stand.

A military beat pounds on the snare drum as Peter returns to his seat.

Verse 1 of “Were you there...”

The Elder comes to the stand

Narrator: Elder, did you collude with Judas to betray Jesus?

Elder: Yes, we needed someone to hand us Jesus. One of his friends, Judas, agreed that he would slip out early and lead us to Jesus. We caught up with them in the Garden. We needed to pick Jesus out of the crowd. The signal was a kiss. We paid Judas Iscariot 30 silver coins for his role. I think he regretted it almost immediately. I heard that he was so haunted by it, that he threw away the coins and even took his own life.

Narrator: Thank-you Elder. I call Caiaphas the high priest to the stand.

A military beat pounds on the drum as the Elder returns to his seat and Caiaphas steps forward.

Narrator: Caiaphas, were you there when they crucified our Lord?

Caiaphas: Of course I was there. Well, not on the hill outside the city. I wouldn't go to Golgatha. But I was there when they accused him. It was my duty. I have to keep the peace. The Passover is such a dangerous time. They flood the city in pilgrimage and they tell their freedom stories. The threat of rebellion is always a risk. And that Jesus was a risk. I was the one who told everyone, "It is better that one man should die for the people".

You see, I firmly believe that sometimes, the end justifies the means. And sometimes, you have to manipulate a mob to get the right outcome. We interrogated that Jesus but he was uncooperative. Blasphemous too. You can't just tolerate that kind of thing.

I did my best to get credible witnesses. When that didn't work, I appealed to tradition. We usually release one condemned man at the Passover. This year, I got the crowd to call out and choose another. Barabbas I think. And they condemned Jesus to death calling out "crucify him!"

Narrator: Thank-you Caiaphas. You may step down. I call Pilate to the stand.

A military beat pounds on the drum as Caiaphas sits down.

Verse 2 of "Were you there..."

Pilate comes forward

Narrator: Pilate, were you there when they crucified Jesus?

Pilate: Yes. Though I wish I wasn't. I really didn't want anything to do with it. I knew he wasn't a criminal. I knew he was innocent. I would have liked to let him go. My wife begged me to release him, you know.

I didn't care about him so much, but I didn't want to be involved in such nasty politics. I wish the high priest and his crew could have handled it themselves. But they needed my authority.

It was the threat that persuaded me. "If you don't do it, you won't be a friend to the emperor" they said. And a mob can exert tremendous pressure. So I guess you could say it was political expediency that made me hand over Jesus to be crucified. Who wants to lose a secure job?

And yes, it's true that I asked, "what is Truth?". Said it sarcastically, I guess. But you should remember that I tried to prevent his death. I thought it would happen when I offered to set a prisoner free. I thought they would choose Jesus of Nazareth. I never dreamt the crowd would choose Barabbas. In the end, the rabble decided.

And that bit about me washing my hands. I wake up, night after night, trying to wash the blood off my hands. You can't imagine the guilt and misery I live with. If I've learned anything from this – don't try and weasel your way out of your responsibility. It never works.

Narrator: Thank you Pilate – you may take your seat. I call the Roman soldier to the stand.

A military beat pounds on the drum as Pilate returns to his seat.

Verse 3 of "Were you there..."

Roman Soldier comes to the stand

Narrator: Roman soldier, were you there when they crucified Jesus?

Roman Soldier: I was there. I was closer than anyone. You can't crucify a man without touching his body. You hear his breathing, smell his sweat. You try not to see the fear and panic in his eyes. Someone has to do the dirty work, I guess. And it is true that we taunted him a little. The crown of thorns and the purple robe – that was us. And you can't blame our unit for throwing dice to see who would get the dead man's clothes. Our pay isn't so good. You have to top it up where you can. And what would you expect us to do while we waited for him to die? Sometimes, death is a long time coming.

I was following orders. It wasn't *my* idea. It wasn't *my* choice. I was just following orders.

Narrator: Thank-you. You can take your seat. I call Simon of Cyrene to the stand.

A military beat pounds on the drum as the soldier returns to his seat and Simon of Cyrene comes forward.

Narrator: Simon of Cyrene, were you there when they crucified our Lord?

Simon of Cyrene: I was there. Just by chance, really. I saw the procession. I knew it was probably another crucifixion. I saw a man struggling to carry his cross. I always thought that was going too far – making the condemned carry their own cross. I remember thinking, "he's not going to make it." Then, before I knew what was happening, someone grabbed me. Someone else was yelling. They put the cross on my shoulders and made me carry it for Jesus.

It is a strange experience carrying a cross meant for someone else. It was also an opportunity. I think about it a lot. It was a chance to do something gracious and good in the midst of something so horrible. That day – it changed my life.

Narrator: Thank-you Simon. You may be seated. Next, we call Mary to the stand.

A military beat pounds the drum as Simon takes his seat.

Verse 4 of "Were you there..."

Mary takes the stand.

Narrator: Mary, were you there when they crucified Jesus?

Mary: I was there. I was always there, it seems. From his birth to his death, I was always there.

Yes, I was there when my son died. I don't have the words to describe the pain. If you're a mother, if you're a parent, maybe you can imagine it. I've been thinking about Simeon, that old man in Temple. He met us when we brought Jesus there with our offering. Jesus was just six weeks old then and I could still carry him in my arms. Simeon said, "a sword will pierce your heart too". I didn't know what he meant. But now I do.

One of the last things Jesus did was to tell his friend to look after me. He said, "there is your mother and there is your son". That's just like him – always thinking of others. He was so compassionate. And they took him from me. My heart is torn with such terrible sorrow.

Narrator: Thank you. You may take your seat. I call Barabbas to the stand.
A military beat pounds the drum as Mary takes her seat and Barabbas comes forward.

Narrator: Barabbas, were you there when they crucified our Lord?

Barabbas: I was there. And for me, it meant everything. My life. When Pilate asked the crowd which one of us they wanted freed, I never expected them to choose me. I expected them to choose Jesus. He was better known. Everyone had heard of Jesus. Me? I'm nobody. But they yelled my name – "Barabbas! Give us Barabbas!" I was stunned. That day I walked away. I'm free because they crucified him. For me.

Narrator: Thank you for your testimony. You may sit down. I call the Centurion forward.
A military beat pounds on the drum as Barabbas sits.
Verse 5 of "Were you there..."
The Centurion comes forward

Narrator: Centurion, where were you when they nailed Jesus to the cross?

Centurion: I was there. I was right there. I was on that hill outside the city. I did the dirty work. I heard the conversation between Jesus and the other convicts. The one guy taunted Jesus, told him to prove he was God and come down from the cross. And save them all! The other criminal asked Jesus to remember him. And I heard Jesus say, "today you will be with me in paradise." I saw it all. But let me tell you something. When I heard his last words and saw him die, that's when I knew. This man was the Son of God. We executed the Son of God that day.

Narrator: Thank-you, Centurion. You may go. I call Joseph of Arimathea to the stand.

A military beat pounds on the drum as the Centurion returns to his seat and Joseph of Arimathea comes forward.

Narrator: Joseph of Arimathea, were you there when they crucified our Lord?

Joseph of Arimathea: No, I wasn't there. Not at the crucifixion. But I sat on the council. I was there when they held those discussions and tried to decide how to get rid of this troublesome person. I was against it. Jesus was no criminal. I knew that they felt threatened by him. The crowds loved him and he taught with authority. But to execute him? That was just wrong.

That night, after Jesus died, I was the one who took the body down. I guessed that there wasn't a tomb for him, so I decided to lay him in my own tomb. I brought a length of linen and shrouded the body. It was dark by then. That burial was something I did for him. It wasn't much, when you consider what he did for us.

Narrator: Thank you, you may be seated. I call a resident of Jerusalem forward.

A military beat pounds of the drum while Joseph of Arimathea is seated.

Verse 1 of "Were you there.."

The Resident of Jerusalem comes forward

Narrator: Were you there, when they crucified Jesus?

Resident of Jerusalem: Yes, I was there. Sometimes, we follow the procession when there is an execution. You might think that is morbid. Cruel, even. But life is rough and we see it all. That day, the crowd was large and restless; the procession was long; and I heard that one of the condemned was Jesus of Nazareth. He was a healer. A teacher too. I wasn't surprise, really. Our leaders didn't support him. I think they were jealous of him because he attracted such crowds. He was especially popular with the sick and the poor.

Above his cross, I saw the words "King of the Jews". I don't know who put them there. I thought it was a cruel irony. You don't crucify a king – you honour him! I stayed there a long time, watching and waiting. A number of times, I turned to go. But just as I was about to leave, Jesus spoke. I couldn't make out all the words, but I remember hearing him say, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing". I felt like that was a prayer for me too. It was like nothing else I've ever experienced.

Narrator: Thank-you. You may be seated. The crown rests its case.

O Sacred Head... begins.

