

A Reflective Drama for Palm Sunday

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 2 April 2023

A dramatic reflection on the Passion narrative by the Pitt St Players

Palm Sunday A

Isaiah 50: 4-9a; Matthew 21: 1-11

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

Pigeon seller

I just could not work out what was going on at first. There we were, my father and I, selling pigeons as always. Just a regular day in the temple. And then suddenly there's all this commotion – tables going flying, birds screeching, coins falling everywhere. And then I see this man, full of rage, striding through the temple courtyard with a whip of cords telling us all to 'get out' of his father's house.

I felt outraged at first – who did he think he was coming and disrupting our peaceful day? We weren't doing anything unusual. And I was frightened too – he was clearly out of control and violent. So, I hid behind one of the colonnades to watch. My father had taken off along with most of the other stall holders.

Suddenly it all went quiet – maybe the temple guard had cordoned off the area to keep people safe. And I saw him sit down on a step. It was as though all the energy had gone out of him – all that adrenaline drained away. And he was weeping with his head in his hands.

I couldn't help noticing the pigeons. Set free from their cages most of them had flown away. But a small flock were scratching in the dirt around his feet, pecking up some spilt corn from one of the tables. They weren't afraid of him – in fact several had fluttered up onto his shoulders and one flew up onto his head. He looked up, suddenly smiling, speaking gently to the birds and gently stroking them.

And that was when I recognised him – it was that preacher from Nazareth everyone's been talking about – the one who healed people. Then he moved off, still talking to the birds and in that moment, I couldn't help feeling sorry for him. He was sure to be in terrible trouble – you can't disturb the peace like that. He left his whip of cords behind - he's sure to suffer far worse. (*drapes rope around cross and exits*)

Man with water jar

Did I know him well? No – not...well. But I knew I could trust him. And for some extraordinary reason he trusted me! I'd met him a few times over the years when he and his friends came to Jerusalem – over a glass of wine, at the edge of crowds. Early on he looked me in the eye and smiled - what a smile! – and he greeted me; '*shalom*' he said. Nothing out of the ordinary – except for me, to be greeted at all was extraordinary! Oh he knew I was a bit – different shall we say. I mean how many men do you see carrying water with the women? But he didn't seem to care and I loved him for it. I'd have done anything for him.

And I offered – because I could see how it was going to go, '*if ever you and your friends need a safe place to meet, just let me know and you can come to my place – I'll fix it. And if you can't come yourself just tell your friends to find me – I'm easy to spot after all!*'

Even so the request for the Passover meal came as a bit of a shock – I live pretty simply. I rushed around, gathered things together, swept and tidied. I was so delighted he and his friends would honour me like this. But I have to admit I was nervous – he'd been drawing the attention of the authorities a bit. And how was I going to provide for all his followers. '*I don't know if the wine's going to stretch*' I said to one of them. They looked at my water jar and said, '*that jar full of water?*'. I nodded. '*Not going to be a problem then, is it? He's done it before*' – and they winked.

So, we did it. I opened up – his followers came – a whole bunch of women as well. We had the most marvellous time all day, baking and cooking. The aroma of the bread alone was intoxicating. And then he and the twelve arrived – joking and smiling. No one would have thought they knew a warrant was out for his arrest - but we did know of course. All of us knew. He could turn water into wine, but he couldn't keep himself safe. (*shakes their head and slowly puts water jar at foot of cross and exits*)

Peter's wife at last supper

Jesus?! – love him or hate him, that's what they say – nothing in between. But me I loved him and hated him – often on the same day! Oh, I loved him of course – how could I not? He healed my mother that first day for a start – sure way to worm his way into my affections. And I'll say this – he never let us go hungry. Not after I told him – '*it's all very well, telling my husband Pete and his brother to up and follow you along the highways and byways, but whose bringing in the money? We've got mouths to feed.*' And whenever the coffers were getting a bit low, there'd be another 'miraculous' catch of fish – nothing miraculous about it if you ask me. He just had a good eye and the guys would work three times as hard if he asked them. But we all stayed fed.

But he was always trouble. I knew it from the moment I set eyes on him – always whipping up the crowds and annoying the high ups. Anyone could see it was dangerous.

He could put on a show I grant you - - amazing storyteller and all that. But it was bound to end badly. I was there that night – in the upper room. I'd made the bread – I always make the bread and it's the lightest in Galilee, anyone'll tell you. So, he takes the bread (the bread I made, thank you very much!) and breaks it and says '*this is my body given for you. Do this to remember me.*'

All very moving – but the next thing he’s scampering off into the night, and my Peter after him. I pulled Pete back – just for a moment – ‘*you stay out of trouble*’ I said, ‘*if anything happens you’ve never heard of him? Got it?*’. I should’ve known better. He says he tried that – and now I’ve had nothing but ‘*I let him down; I betrayed him.*’ What does he want – to die like him and leave me a widow and the children without a father!

And now whenever I bake a loaf of bread all I can see is his face– smiling, gentle – drives me mad! (*turns towards cross, lifts bread up high and tears in two, placing the pieces at the foot*)

Owner of the potter’s field

(*jingles coins*) I knew it was dirty money of course. Who’d pay thirty beautiful pieces of silver for that patch of dirty clay full of holes and ditches? ‘*We need somewhere to bury the riff raff*’ they said, all hoity toity. Maybe – but you wouldn’t pay that kind of money for it would you? – not unless you had something to hide.

So now I know – that so-called friend of Jesus, Judas – they bought him off. My sister heard about it - women’s talk. Seems he took the hump because Jesus let some woman cover him in expensive perfume. Sounds fair enough to me. But Judas – well from what I can gather he was a bit humourless, bit of a religious zealot – you know the type. Anyway, he got all self-righteous ‘*why was this perfume not sold and given to the poor*’ – and when Jesus didn’t fix it, he decided to give him over to the authorities – presumably he thought he could put the money to a good cause. Betrays him with a kiss of all things – I ask you, how treacherous can you get? But then he comes over all regretful and tries to return the money - but all too late. And soon too late for him as well it turns out.

So, then they didn’t know what to do with the money - Religious people – they don’t like to get their hands dirty do they? Not outwardly at any rate. Have to give that fellow Jesus his due, he had them about right – called them whited sepulchres – all show but death dealing in the end. And they certainly dealt out death to him. Never saw much harm in him myself.

I don’t know what to do with this money now. They didn’t want it in their precious treasury. I don’t want it either. There’s blood all over it. Let the earth have it – it’s no good to anyone. (*throws the money forcefully to the ground near the cross and exits*)

Daughter of Jerusalem

I couldn’t believe it - all those people who used to love his stories and were quick enough to ask for help, baying for his blood. ‘*Crucify him*’ they shouted and the next minute he was being dragged through the streets like a common criminal to be crucified. That good man. That kind man who seemed to care about everyone. I’m only a servant girl, but he told me once he was just a servant too and helped me carry my heavy bundle.

I tore my clothes and the tears just were just streaming down my face. I just couldn’t help it. It was like all the grief, all the trauma of these years of occupation came flooding out. And I wasn’t on my own – a whole group of us started following him up the street – calling out, trying to encourage him, weeping for him. We were being crushed by the crowd – it was hard to keep up – but we elbowed our way through and got to him and the other two criminals they were pushing up the street with him.

But he called out to us – even in the midst of his own pain he was trying to warn us. Telling us not to waste our tears on him, but to weep for the times to come – the times when there would be more suffering, more starvation, more horror. We couldn't bear it. The suffering we were seeing in front of us was enough. He was so weak – they must have flogged half the blood out of him – he kept falling over. In the end they bullied some other poor guy from the country into helping carry the cross beam.

I reached out to him and his fingers touched my scarf (*fingers the scarf*) – it was only for an instant but I feel as though it will bear the imprint of his love – his love and his suffering – for ever. I couldn't watch any more – some of the others kept going – but I fell back. The weight of it all was just too much. I'll never forget his fingers – reaching out – the tenderness, the touch...(*removes her scarf and hangs it around cross*)

Soldier at cross

It should have been just a regular day for us – flog the ones to be flogged, crucify the ones to be crucified, share the pickings, play dice while they die, throw the bodies in the common grave. I never look at them. A job's a job after all. I never listen either – too many last requests, screams and cries – have to stop my ears.

But that day was different. That guy was different. He hardly said a word – but when he spoke it was powerful, considered – not the words of a dying man. And he never moved – never flinched, even when the nails went in – how's that possible? It's the stillness I remember – as though he was the still point around which everything else turned.

And then the women – I remember the women. I never notice wailing women near the crosses – there are always women there wailing, lamenting some father, or lover or child. Sometimes we have to hold them back, drive them away. But this group was different. They never moved or spoke. They just stood there, watching and waiting – waiting for death. But it was as though they waited for something else – not an end but some kind of beginning...

I remember the darkness too – no sun even at noon, and the birds stopped singing - as though the very earth held its breath. And then he cried out – not in despair but in - triumph – *'it is finished'*.

And he breathed his last.... not a gasp but a slow exhalation – a benediction....

And since then, I can't do it anymore – I don't know what I'll do, but no more crucifixions for me. (*holds up the nail – then places it at foot of the cross*)

Salome, Mother of the sons of Zebedee

I'm Salome, mother of the sons of Zebedee – yes, that's right, the one that asked that really stupid question – *'can my boys sit at your right and left hand'*...even as the words came out of my mouth, I knew I shouldn't have spoken. But Jesus was always kind – *'you just don't know what you're asking'*, he said. *'Can you drink the cup I'm about to drink?'* he asked – and we said *'yes'* -but we had no idea. Absolutely, no idea.

But when we stood there and watched him die – his mother, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary – then we began to understand. Sometimes there’s no way out but through. Sometimes we have to let it all go – every last vestige of power or control. Sometimes you just have to be there – nothing more, and that’s enough.

(rest of cast slowly re-enters and joins in with ‘we remember’)

So now – as we struggle on through the miasma of grief and loss – sometimes we catch a glimpse, and we remember.

When we cast the nets and drag in the fish. *(places fish at foot of cross)*

We remember.

When we tell the stories and sing the songs.

We remember.

When we shoulder the burdens and wash the feet.

We remember.

When we cry out for justice and stand with the oppressed.

We remember.

When we break the bread and drink the wine.

We remember.

And every time we remember,

Christ lives among us and love triumphs once again.

Credits

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|--|-----------------|
| Author and Producer | Rev Penny Jones |
| Pigeon seller – (rope) | Jolyon Bromley |
| Man with water jar – (jug for water/wine) | Orange Kao |
| Peter’s wife at last supper – (Basket of bread) | Karen Hackett |
| Owner of the potter’s field – (handful of coins) | Warren Talbot |
| Daughter of Jerusalem – (purple shawl/scarf) | Meredith Knight |
| Soldier at cross (nail) | John Thorpe |
| Salome, Mother of the sons of Zebedee – (fish) | Ros Whiley |