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PREVIEW



Easter

READINGS

6 DRAMATIC READINGS
FOR HOLY WEEK

BY GEORGE HALITZKA

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Easter Readings

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Easter Readings

By George Halitzka

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We Want Barabbus!

Based on Mark 15:6-15

STORYTELLER 1: A condemned man waits.

STORYTELLER 2: The night is eternal, sleepless. The end will arrive at a preset time and place in a predetermined manner. It looms over every thought.

STORYTELLER 1: "How bad will it hurt?"

STORYTELLER 2: "Will I cry; will I soil myself?"

STORYTELLER 1: "Was my life worth the oxygen I used?"

STORYTELLER 2: "Was I bad enough to deserve this?"

STORYTELLER 1: "Will anybody remember me without hate?"

STORYTELLER 2: "What lies beyond the final reckoning?"

STORYTELLER 1: The fear and anticipated relief from all fear are equally palpable.

STORYTELLER 2: Morning. The door opens; the guards enter. The stuporous prisoner is half-dragged through the corridor.

STORYTELLER 1: Dead man walking.

STORYTELLER 2: His crimes were barbarous. Men knifed in the streets. Revolutionary intentions, treasonous actions. A rebellion was begun and enemy blood spilled.

STORYTELLER 1: The Cause was higher than the law, higher than life. But was it worth *this*?

STORYTELLER 2: The executioner awaits. The next turn will surely reveal his steely face.

STORYTELLER 1: But the corridor does not lead to the block. Instead, it winds upwards to a spacious porch.

STORYTELLER 2: In the center, on a throne, the governor. On one side, a bleeding man in a purple robe and a prickly crown.

STORYTELLER 1: Below, a mob. Chanting his name: *"We want Barabbus!"*

STORYTELLER 2: The governor unfeelingly waves his hand. The chains are removed; his life is spared. He blinks in the sunlight and almost passes out.

STORYTELLER 1: Then he is roughly shoved towards the mob that calculatingly gave him his life to impose its will on another.

STORYTELLER 2: He is in shock. He falls to his knees. From his prone position, between the heads of the rabble, he sees another man shoved towards a cross.

(Short pause.)

STORYTELLER 1: Barabbus felt as though he alone gave the push that sent the purple-robed man to his death.

STORYTELLER 2: But he didn't. He had your help.

Veil of Darkness

Based on Matthew 27:45-56

STORYTELLER 1: It was thick and complete – not a storm, not an eclipse.

STORYTELLER 2: A veil of shadows thicker and more fearsome than night enveloped Skull Hill. Wrath shattered rocks; justice shook the firmament.

STORYTELLER 1: From every soul in every village in every nation, treachery and debauchery, idolatry and deceit had been collected, drawn with irresistible force, and concentrated with crushing intensity on the dislocated shoulders of a broken human body.

STORYTELLER 2: Now a veil of blackness broke the communion of the Father and the Son, intact since eternity – a separation of holiness from the sin of the world.

STORYTELLER 1: The intimate fellowship of God and God that will never end, a marriage of Essences inconceivable to flesh-bound humans, was broken.

STORYTELLER 2: Purity could not gaze upon filth. The veil of darkness fell between Father and Son.

(Pause.)

STORYTELLER 1: It is customary at Easter to discuss the process of crucifixion in great detail.

STORYTELLER 2: The thorns. The nails. The blood. The spear.

STORYTELLER 1: But the greatest suffering Jesus endured was none of these.

STORYTELLER 2: When the Son of Man was crushed by every sin and the eternal intimacy of the Trinity was torn asunder, that was the moment when Jesus' soul screamed in agony. He cried out when the veil of darkness fell.

STORYTELLER 1: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

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STORYTELLER 2: Jesus, who had known nothing but love for all eternity . . . was abandoned by its Source when darkness fell.

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The Rest of the Prophecy

Based on Isaiah 53 and Luke 23:50-24:12

STORYTELLER 1: He was despised and rejected by humankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.

STORYTELLER 2: Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

STORYTELLER 1: He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

STORYTELLER 2: Yet though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days.

STORYTELLER 1: After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

STORYTELLER 2: From the book of Isaiah the Prophet, chapter 53.

(Pause.)

STORYTELLER 1: Nobody expected the rest of the prophecy to come true.

STORYTELLER 2: The first part of Isaiah's prediction had been fulfilled.

STORYTELLER 1: The "despised and rejected," "stricken and afflicted" part.

STORYTELLER 2: But the rest of the prophecy, where it said Jesus would "see his offspring" and "prolong his days"?

STORYTELLER 1: Nobody believed *that* part.

STORYTELLER 2: After the crucifixion, the disciples were playing ostrich in a rented room on the wrong side of the tracks, hiding from whatever bogeymen might be out to get them.

STORYTELLER 1: Jesus' mother and Mary Magdalene went to his

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tomb. But they only stayed long enough to find out where they could embalm him after the Sabbath.

STORYTELLER 2: The Jewish leaders didn't expect a resurrection. When they posted guards in the graveyard, their only interest was preventing a hoax.

STORYTELLER 1: Now, Jesus' death did bring a couple of closet disciples into the open, but they weren't looking for miracles.

STORYTELLER 2: Joseph of Arimathia was a secret member of Christ's fan club who also served on the Jewish ruling council. He found the guts to ask Pilate for Jesus' body.

STORYTELLER 1: Nicodemus came along to help, which was big news. He's the one who – when Jesus was alive – only visited at night, when nobody could see him.

STORYTELLER 2: Maybe Joseph and Nicodemus figured if Jesus was gone, they couldn't get in trouble any more.

STORYTELLER 1: Maybe they felt guilty for not sticking by the Rabbi when he was alive, and decided to do too little-too late.

STORYTELLER 2: In any case, they definitely expected Jesus to stay dead!

(A brief pause.)

STORYTELLER 1: Not much has changed in 2000 years.

STORYTELLER 2: Jesus still has closet followers like Joseph and Nicodemus, who won't admit to knowing him until it's perfectly safe.

STORYTELLER 1: Others, like the 12 disciples, run away at the first sign of danger.

STORYTELLER 2: Some claim to follow him, but like the Marys, only visit the cross and the tomb. They don't encounter the risen Christ.

STORYTELLER 1: And to this day, pharisees care more about maintaining the status quo than encountering the Messiah.

STORYTELLER 2: But the first-century observers had an excuse – the resurrection hadn't happened.

STORYTELLER 1: They had every reason to expect the Lord to stay in the tomb, every reason to believe their Messiah-Radar had malfunctioned, every reason to think Jesus wasn't God.

STORYTELLER 2: We don't.

STORYTELLER 1: This Easter, are we living radically in the light of the resurrection?

STORYTELLER 2: Or like Joseph and Nicodemus, are we hiding until it's too late . . .

STORYTELLER 1: . . . And living like Jesus stayed dead?

After the Rooster

Based on John 21

STORYTELLER 1: Simon was always called Peter: the Rock.

STORYTELLER 2: But depending on the day, that could refer to his strength in building the church—

STORYTELLER 3: —Or the contents of his head.

STORYTELLER 1: In the Upper Room, Peter said:

STORYTELLER 3: “Jesus, I don’t care if everybody else runs away. *I’m* your friend for life. In fact, I’ll even die with you, if that’s what it takes!”

STORYTELLER 2: Later that night, in a turnaround that would make a Chicago politician blush with pride, Peter denied Jesus three times, then made a rooster live in infamy for crowing too much.

STORYTELLER 1: After that, he promptly joined the other disciples in playing hide-and-seek from whoever was out to get them.

STORYTELLER 3: Peter was not a “teacher’s pet” kind of apostle.

STORYTELLER 2: But don’t you think he might change his tune after the resurrection? After all, Peter witnessed the empty tomb, then saw Jesus alive and kickin’ twice!

STORYTELLER 3: Well . . . not exactly. A few days later, what do we find Peter doing [in John 21]?

STORYTELLER 1: Fishing.

STORYTELLER 2: Not for men. For fish.

STORYTELLER 3: I can’t say for sure, but I suspect Peter was still beating himself up for denying his Savior.

STORYTELLER 1: He didn’t think God could restore him to his old job of apostle-ing. So he figured:

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STORYTELLER 3: “Back to the grind . . . better patch up the nets and head for the lake.”

STORYTELLER 2: But that’s not the way Jesus works.

STORYTELLER 3: Peter forgot the lesson about footwashing that Jesus had taught him a few days before in the Upper Room.

STORYTELLER 1: See, on a daily basis, no matter how long I’ve known Jesus, no matter how “spiritual” I’m feeling, I’m going to blow it.

STORYTELLER 2: Possibly before tomorrow, I’ll catch myself being a prideful ball of selfishness.

STORYTELLER 3: In the morning, I may choose to enjoy the ministry of the comforter—the one on my bed—instead of spending quality time with my Maker.

STORYTELLER 1: So what business do I have calling myself a Jesus-follower?

STORYTELLER 2: How dare I think that the day after I blow it, I can come back to God and talk to him like nothing ever happened?

STORYTELLER 3: Well, it’s because Jesus died once and for all.

STORYTELLER 1: I’m already a Christian. I’m already clean.

STORYTELLER 2: All I need is a little foot-washing—daily coming to God, admitting what I did wrong, and working to turn it around.

STORYTELLER 3: But sometimes, I fall into the same trap that Peter did when he went back to fishing.

STORYTELLER 1: If I commit a “little” sin, I might as well add some more. I’m already a failure.

STORYTELLER 2: If I skip a day—or two or three—of prayer, I’ll just give up.

STORYTELLER 3: It’s no use hopping back on the straight and narrow after I’ve detoured down the wide road.

STORYTELLER 1: But that’s not the way Jesus works.

STORYTELLER 2: Here's the best definition I've ever heard of repentance: "To turn 180 degrees and go God's way."

STORYTELLER 3: In God's economy, the key question isn't "What did I do?"

STORYTELLER 1: It's "What am I going to do about it?"

STORYTELLER 2: Will I quit following Jesus and go back to fishing?

STORYTELLER 3: Or will I do a daily 180, allow the Rabbi to wash my feet?

STORYTELLER 1: If the disciple with rocks in his head could be restored to friendship after he denied his Savior . . . maybe I can, too.

STORYTELLER 2: It doesn't matter what I did an hour ago. In this moment, as Jesus restores me to full friendship with him –

STORYTELLER 1: – His words to me are the same ones he spoke to Peter.

STORYTELLER 2: They are simple and few.

STORYTELLER 3: "Follow me."

Betrayal and Love

Based on John 13

(Two NARRATORS stand together by a lectern on one side of the stage. They read from the script. Center, JESUS, PETER, and JUDAS, all in modern street clothes, stand with their heads lowered and backs to the audience. As they enact their roles, they step forward and speak their memorized lines to each other. JESUS carries a basin and towel.)

NARRATOR 1: It wasn't exactly the moment of decision, the political maneuvering was underway.

NARRATOR 2: But perhaps it *was* the straw that broke the camel's back.

NARRATOR 1: Dinner was in progress, bellies were getting full, and our friend decided it was put up or shut up time.

NARRATOR 2: Tonight, the Boss better talk about the hostile-takeover plans that were going to make three years of hard work pay off, or he was a dead man.

NARRATOR 1: Either something practical came out of this nonsense about beggars and hospital cases, or the assassination moved full speed ahead.

NARRATOR 2: And then the Boss made the move that, in our friend's mind, sealed his fate.

NARRATOR 1: He stood up . . .

NARRATOR 2: Took off his coat . . .

NARRATOR 1: Picked up a basin . . .

NARRATOR 2: And started washing feet.

(Pause. JESUS, PETER, and JUDAS turn to face the audience; PETER and JUDAS sit down on stools. JESUS ties a towel around his waist, walks over to PETER, and kneels at his feet.)

NARRATOR 1: Jesus went to Peter first, the man who wanted to be

Top Dog in the Kingdom of Heaven, the guy who needed a foot washing worse than anybody else – mostly because he was always shoving his size tens in his mouth.

NARRATOR 2: Here was the guy who, in a few hours, would claim he never met his best friend. At least he had some shame.

PETER: Lord, are you going to wash *my* feet?

JESUS (*nodding his head and smiling*): You don't get it yet, Peter. But later on—

NARRATOR 2: — About the same time a rooster crows three times —

JESUS: — You'll understand.

PETER (*drawing away from JESUS*): You will never wash my feet!

JESUS: If I don't wash you, you don't belong to me.

PETER: Well, then don't just wash my feet! Wash my hands and my head, too.

JESUS (*laughing gently*): Peter, I cleaned you up when you believed. You just need a little dust rinsed off. (*He looks at JUDAS with sorrow and pity.*) All of you, except one, have been cleaned.

(*JESUS kneels at the feet of JUDAS and begins to wash his feet.*)

NARRATOR 1: Then Jesus bent down at the feet of Judas, the disciple who was in it for himself. He even skimmed from the funds that were earmarked for the poor. Judas was waiting impatiently for this “Kingdom of Heaven” that would throw the Romans out and elevate him to a cushy government job.

NARRATOR 2: However, he'd grown so disillusioned with Jesus' upside-down kingdom that he was about to walk through the door and sell the Boss for 30 bucks.

NARRATOR 1: Jesus knelt by the betrayer's calloused soles, dipped them in clean water, and tried to rub away three years of pounding the Judean pavement in sandals. Some road dust . . . a rancid scrap of food from the gutter . . . camel dung.

NARRATOR 2: Jesus took the foot of the betrayer and lovingly cradled

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it in his arms, then applied the towel wrapped around his waist. But Judas' thoughts ran cold:

JUDAS: The fool! He's too busy doing slave work to stop what I've planned.

NARRATOR 1: It's no accident that a few minutes later, Judas left the room to seal God's fate with a kiss.

NARRATOR 2: Betrayal and love have never understood each other.

(JESUS stands and removes the towel from his waist.)

NARRATOR 1: Jesus finished washing the feet of prideful, lustful, greedy, unwise, capricious men; twelve in all.

NARRATOR 2: He completed the work that was usually left to the lowest slave in the house. Then he looked Peter in the eye.

JESUS: Do you understand what I've done? If I, your lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you should wash each others' feet. Slaves are not superior to their owners, or messengers to the people who send them. You are blessed whenever you follow my example.

(JESUS lays the basin and towel aside.)

NARRATOR 1: It's amazing, isn't it? How two different people can have the same experience and interpret it in completely different ways?

NARRATOR 2: Oh, Peter didn't walk out the door and become a "teacher's pet" kind of apostle.

NARRATOR 1: But after he denied his savior, he remembered Jesus' sign of love. He knew that anybody who'd wash the feet of scum like him would also take him back.

(PETER kneels at JESUS' feet, asking forgiveness.)

NARRATOR 2: He went on to become the rock of the church, a servant so devoted that he washed thousands of their sins.

NARRATOR 1: When the executioner came for Peter, he asked to be crucified upside-down because he wasn't worthy to imitate the savior. Not even in death.

NARRATOR 2: Judas started to feel uneasy as soon as he realized that

Jesus knew what he knew.

NARRATOR 1: The betrayer missed the point: for him, foot-washing sealed Jesus' fate. Slave work was not his spiritual gift.

(JUDAS turns his back on the audience, removing himself from the scene.)

NARRATOR 2: He walked into the night and only looked back when the deed was done, when the only way out seemed to be a strong branch and a noose.

NARRATOR 1: But then, betrayal and love have never understood each other.

NARRATOR 2: Just after the traitor left with clean feet and a heart of filth, the Lord said:

JESUS *(to PETER, who is still kneeling):* Love each other in the same way I have loved you. Everyone will know that you are my disciples because of your love for one another.

NARRATOR 1: The basin and towel were lying on the floor, giving mute testimony to his words.

NARRATOR 2: Peter and Judas just interpreted them a bit differently.

Paradise

Loosely based on Luke 23:39-43

PART 1

STORYTELLER: When Joseph was eight years old, the soldiers came into his village and destroyed life as he knew it. There had been an attempt on the governor's life and the soldiers were ordered to kill twenty men in retaliation, but Joseph didn't know that. What he did know – and learned in an instant – was that his father was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and that people have a lot of blood in them.

Joseph rushed to his father's body before the killer had time to walk away. He remembered staring into that soldier's eyes in disbelief and seeing steel staring back. From that moment on, he hated all men of that kind.

For some reason, his mother never took him to the synagogue anymore.

When Joseph was twelve, he and his mother moved to the capital. There was supposed to be more opportunity there. But things became so bad that his mother was reduced to selling her body on the streets. Her customers were often soldiers, the same kind that had killed Joseph's father. His hatred for them grew and festered.

Then one day, Joseph met a group of young men who were dedicated to overthrowing the occupying government. He eagerly joined them and went on his first "mission" less than a month later. He personally killed two soldiers. Finally, he felt that his father's death was avenged.

When he arrived home, however – after being gone for more than a week – his mother began to ask questions. The whole story spilled out, even the part about the killings. She urged him to stop seeking revenge and forgive the soldiers for what they did to his father.

She had started listening to the teachings of a strange street preacher while he was gone. He talked about loving your adversaries and praying for your abusers. Joseph told her it was ridiculous. She cried. He went back to his friends.

Each time he went on a mission, Joseph killed at least one soldier. But

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END OF FREE PREVIEW

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