

## Good Friday Reader's Theater

**Narrator:** Very early in the morning the leading priests, elders, and teachers of religious law met to discuss their next step. They bound Jesus, led him away, and took him to Pilate, the Roman governor. Pilate asked Jesus,

**Pilate:** Are you the King of the Jews?

**Jesus:** Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?

**Pilate:** Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?

**Jesus:** My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting my arrest. But as it is, my kingdom is from another place.

**Pilate:** So you are a king?

**Jesus:** You say that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this purpose came I into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.

**Pilate:** What is truth?

**Narrator:** After Pilate had said this, he went out to the Jews and told them,

**Pilate:** I find no case against him.

**Narrator:** Now it was the governor's custom each year during the Passover celebration to release one prisoner to the crowd—anyone they wanted. This year there was a notorious prisoner, a man named Jesus Barabbas, a revolutionary who had committed murder in an uprising. As the crowds gathered before Pilate's headquarters that morning, he asked them,

**Pilate:** Who do you want me to release to you—Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?

**Narrator:** He knew very well that the religious leaders had arrested Jesus out of envy. Just then, as Pilate was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him this message:

**Pilate's Wife:** Leave that innocent man alone. I suffered through a terrible nightmare about him last night.

**Narrator:** Meanwhile, the leading priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be released and for Jesus to be put to death. So when Pilate asked again,

**Pilate:** Which of these two do you want me to release to you?

**Narrator:** The crowd shouted back,

**Crowd:** Barabbas!

**Pilate:** Then what should I do with this man you call the king of the Jews?

**Crowd:** Crucify him!

**Pilate:** Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.

**Narrator:** The Jewish authorities answered him saying,

**Jewish Authorities:** We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.

**Narrator:** When Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus,

**Pilate:** Where are you from?

**Narrator:** But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate said to him,

**Pilate:** Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?

**Jesus:** You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.

**Narrator:** From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out,

**Crowd:** “If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.”

**Pilate:** “Why? What crime has he committed?”

**Narrator:** But the mob roared even louder,

**Crowd:** “Crucify him!”

**Narrator:** So to pacify the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Jesus to be flogged, and then turned him over to the Roman soldiers to be crucified. Some of the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into their headquarters and called out the entire regiment. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. They wove thorn branches into a crown and put it on his head, and they placed a reed in his right hand as a scepter. Then they knelt before him in mockery and taunted,

**Soldiers:** “Hail! King of the Jews!”

**Narrator:** And they spit on him and grabbed the stick and struck him on the head with it. When they were finally tired of mocking him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him again. Then they led him away to be crucified. As they led Jesus away, a man named Simon, who was from northern Africa, happened to be coming in from the countryside. The soldiers seized him and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large crowd trailed behind, including many grief-stricken women. But Jesus turned and said to them,

**Jesus:** “Daughters of Jerusalem, don’t weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For the days are coming when they will say, ‘Fortunate indeed are the women who are childless, the wombs that have not borne a child and the breasts that have never nursed.’ People will beg the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and plead with the hills, ‘Bury us.’ For if these things are done when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

**Narrator:** Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. When they came to a place called The Skull, the soldiers nailed Jesus to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left. Jesus said,

**Jesus:** “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”

**Narrator:** Pilate posted a sign on the cross that read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” The place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek, so that many people could read it. Then the leading priests objected and said to Pilate,

**Chief Priests:** “Change it from ‘The King of the Jews’ to ‘He said, I am King of the Jews.’”

**Pilate:** “No, what I have written, I have written.”

**Narrator:** When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they divided his clothes among the four of them. They also took his robe, but it was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom. So they said,

**Soldiers:** “Rather than tearing it apart, let’s throw dice for it.”

**Narrator:** This fulfilled the Scripture that says, “They divided my garments among themselves and threw dice for my clothing.” So that is what the soldiers did. The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed.

**Chief Priests:** “He saved others,” they said, “let him save himself if he is really God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

**Narrator:** The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. They called out to him,

**Soldiers:** “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”

**Narrator:** One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed,

**Criminal #1:** “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us!”

**Narrator:** But the other criminal protested,

**Criminal #2:** “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.”

**Jesus [speaking to Criminal #2]:** “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

**Narrator:** Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother,

**Jesus:** “Woman, here is your son.”

**Narrator:** Then he said to the disciple,

**Jesus:** “Here is your mother.”

**Narrator:** And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. At noon, darkness fell across the whole land. Then at three o’clock Jesus called out with a loud voice,

**Jesus:** “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?”

**Narrator:** This means “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture),

**Jesus:** “I am thirsty.”

**Narrator:** A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. Finally, Jesus exclaimed,

**Jesus:** “It is finished! Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit!”

**Narrator:** Then Jesus breathed his last breath. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and rocks split apart. When the Roman officer who stood facing him saw how he had died, he exclaimed,

**Roman officer:** “This man truly was the Son of God!”

**Narrator:** Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.” As evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea took a risk and boldly went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. (Joseph was an honored member of the Sanhedrin, and he was waiting for the Kingdom of God to come.) Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths and laid it in a tomb that had been carved out of the rock. Then Joseph of Arimathea rolled a stone in front of the entrance and left. Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb and watching. They saw where Jesus’ body was laid.