

Facing the Shadows – A Tenebrae Drama

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*This script is intended for use as a whole service of worship. The format is what I call **Liturgical Drama**. The idea here is to draw the whole congregation into the dramatic presentation, using the media of drama as the worship experience. So, effectively, there are actors, there are worship leaders and there are worshippers all sharing in the drama of worship. The bits of the script in bold print are said by the congregation, so they must be made visible in some way for them to see (projection on a screen usually works best).*

This script includes a time of communion, places for congregational singing, and congregational responses. Those who act the parts of the different characters in the Easter story must take their role as actors seriously, and remain in character for the duration of the service if the drama is to flow comfortably with the rest of the service. In the sense of their participation in the worship, the actors remain 'outside' of the worship (they do not stand and sing for example) – almost as if we look through a window at them when their time to tell their story comes.

As in a traditional Tenebrae Service, a table is prepared with seven candles. For this script, it is best if it is the same table as the communion table, and is set out to look like the table Jesus shared with His disciples at the Last Supper. After each monologue, the actor extinguishes one candle. After the final monologue (Mary) the last candle is extinguished, and the church is left in darkness for a few moments. Unlike the traditional Tenebrae Service, there are a few words to be said with the relighting of the last candle, and the service closes with the congregation receiving communion, and leaving the church in silence.

While this format may feel uncomfortable at first, with some good co-operation between directors and worship leaders (who ideally should be the same person if possible), it can be a very powerful experience of worship for all involved. Experiment and have fun.

John

Call to Worship & Blessings of Communion Elements

Worship Leader:

On this night we gather to remember.

**We open our hearts and minds to relive the pain and victory
which have become for us the doorway to the eternal.**

We recognise the Shadows which encroach on every life,
and meditate on that one moment in history when the Shadows
seemed to extinguish the light entirely.

**We come in awe and in worship, for the darkness has never, and will never,
overcome the Light
revealed in the human life and death of Jesus Christ.**

And so, let us recollect the last meal that Jesus shared with His friends.

On the night of His agony and arrest, the followers of Christ gathered with Him around a supper table.

As they were eating, He took a loaf of bread and said to them,

"This is My body, broken for you. Take and eat this and remember Me."

When the meal was complete, He took the cup of wine and said to them,

"This is My blood shed for you. Take and drink this and remember Me."

And so we do this, now and always, in grateful and loving memory
of the One Who gave Himself for us.

As Communion is received, the congregation sings

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Monologue: The Shadow of Betrayal – Judas*(Based on Mt.26:20-25)*

I don't know when it happened, but things changed somehow. At first He was strong, confident, outspoken. I had such high hopes – finally, a leader to throw off the Romans!

But, just when the time was right – at the height of His popularity, He withdrew. He became quiet, almost introspective. I thought a bit of a push would help Him to reach for greatness. You know, pass on a bit of information about His movements (and make a bit on the side for me), and then watch Him rise to victory when they came for Him . . .

Only, it didn't work out like that. He let them take Him.

"You'll betray me, Judas," He said. I wonder how He knew – I thought I'd been discreet . . .

But, I didn't expect it to turn out the way it did . . .

Lord, have mercy

Christ, have mercy

Lord, have mercy.

Judas extinguishes the first candle.

The congregation sings:

Monologue: The Shadow of Inner Agony – Salome (The Mother of James and John)*(Based on Lk.22:39-46)*

He was such a unique boy, my nephew. Cousin to my sons James and John, but more of a friend to them, really . . . and to me.

He was always caring, always serving, always putting others first.

I remember when I asked Him if my boys could sit on thrones with Him in His Kingdom – one on His left and one on His right.

"Salome," He said to me, "The great ones in God's Kingdom are the ones who serve. Even I have come to serve, and to lay down my life." I felt rather humbled that day.

It's incredible that in His time of agony, praying all alone, the ones He served so well couldn't serve Him in return . . . not for one short hour. There they were, my sons and Peter – all asleep while Jesus cried and sweated blood. And none of the others of us were any better.

Alone he prayed, "Take this cup away from Me. But, not My will, Father – Yours be done."

Lord, have mercy

Christ, have mercy

Lord have mercy

Salome extinguishes the second candle.

The congregation sings:

Monologue: The Shadow of Desertion – John*(Based on Mt.26:47-50;55-56)*

That was a dark night. We didn't expect those terrible things – perhaps we should have foreseen it, prepared for it. Maybe then, we would have reacted differently and stood with Him through it all.

But, we didn't understand.

So, there we were, Peter, James and me, fast asleep, oblivious to His pain, and suddenly He's waking us up, and there is Judas, and lights and swords and soldiers. And they're arresting Jesus!

We were no match for them, and they would have taken us, too. We were terrified, and so . . . we ran away. All of us.
And left Him to face their swords alone.

Lord, have mercy
Christ, have mercy
Lord, have mercy

John extinguishes the third candle.

The congregation sings:

Monologue: The Shadow of Denial – Peter

(Based on Mt.26:31-35)

What was I thinking! I expected so much more from myself. Oh, at the table it was easy. When Jesus talked about being betrayed and arrested and dying, I was angry and protective.

"I'll fight for You, Lord" I said. "I'll die for you."

I thought He was just frightened and emotional when He replied, "No, Peter. Before the cock crows three times you will deny knowing me."

Deny Him? I wouldn't have thought it possible . . . But, that was then. Now, I know it's true. When it finally came down to it, I couldn't fight for Him. I couldn't die for Him. I couldn't even answer the question – "Yes, I know Him. I follow Him. I believe in Him."

And as they led Him away, He looked at Me. Those eyes – I expected anger and judgement. But, there was only love. In His eyes, there was only ever love . . .

Lord, have mercy
Christ, have mercy
Lord, have mercy

Peter extinguishes the fourth candle.

The congregation sings:

Monologue: The Shadow of Accusation – Mary Magdalene

(Based on Mt.26:59-67)

People were curious about my devotion to Jesus, but it's easy to understand, really. I lived with accusations all my life – adulterer, prostitute, madwoman, evil, possessed – they said it all, and more. And much of it was true.

But, Jesus . . . He didn't accuse. He didn't judge. He didn't make any demands, or require anything. For the first time, someone saw past the pain and brokenness to my soul – and gave me the freedom I longed for.

Of course I was devoted!

Ironic that the One who accepted and included all without accusation, should be forced to hear lies about Himself; should stand alone and face all those pointed fingers. The one whose only crime was acceptance, sentenced to death on the force of false accusations – by the ones He sought to love and heal . . .

Lord, have mercy
Christ, have mercy
Lord, have mercy

Mary Magdalene extinguishes the fifth candle.

The congregation sings:

Monologue: The Shadow of Mockery – Thomas

(Based on Mk.15:12-20)

Somehow, I've developed a reputation for doubt and questioning. A little unfairly, I think . . . But, I do confess to being confused and uncertain – especially at the end.

I mean, He healed the sick, He raised the dead - the whole nation was eating out of the palm of His hand! Then, suddenly, they were shouting "crucify Him!"

With all His power, He just stood there. And then, when the soldiers mocked Him, He took it all. They stripped His body – torn from the terrible flogging – and pretended to worship Him as king. With a crown of hard Judaeian thorns. They hit Him, spat on Him and pulled out His hair and beard.

How was I to understand this? He could have snuffed them out in a heartbeat . . . But, he didn't. He just let them mock.

Lord, have mercy

Christ, have mercy

Lord, have mercy

Thomas extinguishes the sixth candle.

The congregation sings:

Monologue: The Shadow of Death – Mary, the Mother of Jesus

(Based on Lk.23:33-46)

Should I have known that moment would come? There had been death threats from when He was a baby, and He'd spoken about His death more than once. Maybe I should have seen it, but nothing can prepare a mother to watch her child die.

I don't know how I got through that day. My son, sentenced to crucifixion – the slowest and most agonising death. Executed with thieves. My son, who had done nothing wrong.

And in the face of it all, He forgave them – forgave all of us . . .

Then, He cried out, "It is finished" and as I watched that last breath leave His body, it was like it was me dying up there . . .

Lord, have mercy

Christ, have mercy

Lord, have mercy

Mary extinguishes the seventh candle.

The congregation sings:

A moment of silence is observed in the darkness.

Mary continues:

If I was unprepared for Jesus' death, I was completely flabbergasted by what would follow . . .

Mary relights the central candle.

The congregation sings a hymn of praise in anticipation of Easter Sunday

In preparation to receive communion, the following prayer is said by all.

**And so, Lord Jesus, Light of the World,
we come to Your table, confessing the darkness within us.
We come simply because You are merciful,
and You have filled our hearts with Light.
We come to eat this bread and to drink this wine,
and to be changed.
Let Your Presence, which fills us through this meal,
cast out all shadows, and keep us in Your light forever.
Amen.**

Then, the congregation comes forward, washes their hands in bowls of water, as an act of confession, and then receives communion. They are then free to leave the sanctuary. All of this is done in silence.