

Beneath the Cross

**A thought-provoking Good Friday drama sketch by
Brian T. Whitaker, Whitaker Writings**

Cast: Four men in Roman soldier costumes

Summary: Four Roman soldiers are waiting for the three crucified men to die, casting lots for clothing, and drinking. One is very hardened; one is deeply committed to Rome; one is unsure about what they've done, but defaults to supporting Rome; one (a little younger) is so troubled by the Man in the middle that he cannot get Him out of his mind. Could this Man in the middle have been innocent?

This drama is designed for use in a Good Friday service, though it could certainly be used at other times.

Whenever this is done, this drama should be followed by a clear gospel presentation.

Time: 12-15 minutes

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Beneath the Cross

Four Roman Soldiers at the Crucifixion reflect on what they've just done

By Brian T. Whitaker, Whitaker Writings

Characters:

Brutus—The oldest and most senior soldier; cold, hard, unbending

Gaius—(pronounced GĀ-us)—deeply committed to Rome

Portus—unsure if what they've done is right, but stands by what Rome has told him to do

Justus—Perhaps a bit younger than the others, realizes they've crucified an innocent man, or more

Setting:

Under the cross where Jesus and two others are dying. The crosses are not represented on stage at all. The four soldiers start out drinking and casting lots for clothing. The conversation progresses from there.

Brutus—Okay, this one is for his cloak.

(cast lots)

Gaius—Yes! I got it! Always wanted one of these to add to my collection.

Justus—Your collection?

Gaius—Been doing this for years, my boy. I've got quite a collection.

Brutus—Well, I just trade them for better things at the market. What do I need with trophies? I'm just doing my job, serving my country.

Portus—*(holds up his cup)* Here's to Rome!

Gaius, Justus, and Brutus—*(raising their cups)* To Rome!

Brutus—Okay, next piece—the tunic.

(cast lots)

Portus—Hey, I finally got one!

Brutus—This is for the rest of it.

(cast lots)

Brutus—Hey, more to trade at the market. Have to get the blood stains out first, though. That might be hard....

Portus—*(to Justus)* Hey, Justus, you seem a bit quiet. Has something got you down?

[text deleted]

(they fill their cups again)

Brutus—Man, I can't wait to get home tonight. I've got a week's leave coming. I wish they'd just finish dying so we can all go home. It's been a long enough day as it is.

Justus—*(in disbelief)* How can you talk like that?! "Finish dying so we can all go home"?!

Gaius— *(to Justus)* You'd better get used to it, son. Just get the job done and get home. Nothing more, nothing less. You're a soldier. You do what you're told.

Brutus— *(to Justus)* Listen, kid. They're criminals. Criminals! They broke the law. They deserve to be punished. These that end up here *(gestures toward the crosses)*, they're the ones that deserve the worst punishment for what they've done. They're the biggest threat to Rome and all we stand for. And this is the worst we know how to do to them. Most painful death we can give em.

Portus—You know, Justus, there are days I hate having to do this to them. But then again... they deserve it. We just have to do our job. And we hope that other people will see this *(gestures up to the crosses)*, and that will keep them in line so they do what Rome tells them to do.

Gaius—It's not like they didn't get a fair trial or anything.

Justus—But what about this man *(gestures to the center cross)*? Were you there when Pilate was questioning him? It was not like any trial I have ever seen. And I wonder if he got treated fairly.

[text deleted]

Justus—I'm just wondering if...maybe we might have...*(looks around a little to see that nobody's listening; now almost whispering)* could we have just crucified an innocent man?

Brutus—*(he's turned away but still close enough to overhear; he turns back swiftly, almost ready to hit Justus)* Absolutely not! We don't make mistakes like that! Rome doesn't make mistakes like that!

Gaius—*(quickly following with more defense)* Rome is fair and just. And you'd better be careful questioning anything, young man. You need to learn your place. You need to learn when to keep your mouth shut!

Justus—*(now a little bolder)* But have you ever crucified a man who didn't beg for his life? Have you ever crucified a man who didn't curse you? Have you ever crucified a man who looked at you with love instead of hate? I'm telling you, something was different about this man!

[text deleted]

Justus—*(to himself)* I just can't get it out of my head. He was so different! He walked here with pain in His eyes but purpose in His step. He looked like He thought this was His purpose...His goal...His destiny. He WAS different! *(looks up at the sign on the center cross, still wondering and talking to himself)* "The King of the Jews," huh? *(Looks toward the*

ground.) I can't even bear to watch Him suffer. I've never had this happen before. I've been doing this for a couple of years. Why is He so different? Why can't I let this go? What's happening to me? *(Looks up at center cross again, now speaking louder but perhaps not quite enough for Jesus to hear)* Jesus, what is it that makes you so different? Why can't I get you out of my mind? I don't get it, but I think it's getting clearer. There's something in your eyes. Is that love? Compassion? Peace? Even...forgiveness? *(Pauses)* Yes, I see forgiveness in your eyes. Is it possible that you could even love someone like me? That you could forgive someone like me?

(Portus turns to watch Justus now as Justus continues talking toward the center cross)

Now that I've seen everything today, it's becoming much clearer. I think you must be who you said you were. I think you are innocent. *(Kneels and looks up at the center cross, now speaking very boldly)* Surely You are the Son of God!!

(Portus begins to take a thoughtful step toward Justus)

(Lights out)

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Director's Notes

The crosses are not on stage. They are above where the audience/congregation is seated. All gestures toward the men on the crosses should be toward the audience/congregation, including Justus' final submission to Christ. However, it will be very helpful for all four men to clearly know where the "crosses" would be located so they're gesturing consistently in the same direction.

Casting lots: we are not exactly sure what this would have looked like, but it could very accurately be portrayed as if the men are throwing dice on the ground. No actual dice or other objects need to be used; the men can simply pantomime throwing something into the middle of the circle, then reacting as one wins over the other three.

Please follow this presentation with clear gospel invitation. The ground is level at the foot of the cross. We're all equally sinners in the sight of God. Anyone can come today. If the Lord is leading you, do it today.

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