

## HANDS

A Good Friday Play in One Act by Jewell Ellen Smith

Printed 1973 in the uncopyrighted publication "How to Present a Good Friday Prayer Breakfast." All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

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THEME: Each man may fold his hands and pray that God will show him how to use his hands for good; or, he may wash his hands of all Christian responsibility.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND SCRIPTURE:

This simple play is based on Biblical passages describing the trial and crucifixion of Christ. The Epilogue refers to a legend concerning Pontius Pilate.

Members of the cast should study the Scripture references given below. And the Program Director should introduce the play to the audience by explaining facts and legends concerning Pontius Pilate. The following paragraphs may be condensed:

The Four Gospels give a detailed account of the events of Passion Week, glimpses of the political turmoil and religious unrest going on in Jerusalem at the same time. One sees how Pontius Pilate, then Roman procurator of Judea, was persuaded--after much apparent reluctance on his part--to surrender Jesus of Nazareth to his enemies.

Pilate resorted to the old Hebrew ceremony of washing the hands and declared to the mob: "I am innocent of the blood of this just person." Then, he ordered the scourging and the death by crucifixion.

Historians, as well as those who pass on traditions and myths, disagree as to what later happened to Pontius Pilate. It is known that he was deprived of his office in 36AD. One story is that he was banished to Gaul, that he died by suicide, and that his body was thrown into the River Rhone. And, according to the legend, the river refused his body. Another account has it that Pilate died in Rome, where his body was cast into the Tiber--causing violent tempests and inundations.

To this day, according to these legendary stories, Pilate's ghost ever haunts many quiet lakes and gushing rivers; for he still tries to find water that will wash clean his hands. This, of course, is sheer fiction. It is retold only to arouse interest in the drama titled "Hands" and to further an understanding of the Epilogue.

Scripture passages which tell what did actually occur in Jerusalem when Christ was crucified are as follows: Matthew 27:17-58, Mark 15:46-47 and 16:1-5, Luke 24:15-14, John 18 and 19

#### RÉSUMÉ OF PLAY:

Cleopas and a Companion, both followers of Jesus, enter from left front of stage. Sad and dejected, they talk of going home to Emmaus. They sit down to rest a bit, and they recount the events that have taken place in Jerusalem in the past few days--Christ's trial, crucifixion, and burial. As the two talk, the following three sub-scenes are depicted on the back part of the stage, as things they witness again in the mind's eye: (Cleopas and Companion talk to each other between scenes.)

- a. A mob has gathered on the Jerusalem street in front of the Judgment Hall. They wait for Pilate to appear. When he arrives, the mob clamors for Jesus to be crucified, for Barabbas to be released. Pilate washes his hands, orders the crucifixion.
- b. Three Roman soldiers discuss Jesus and recall how they mocked him. Simon of Cyrene walks by, and they compel him to join their ranks so that he can later bear the cross for the prisoner of Nazareth.
- c. Three Women: Mary Magdalene, Salome, and the other Mary, hurry toward the Holy Sepulchre--with sweet spices. They talk briefly.

(Cleopas and Companion rise and start on their journey, following signs that lead them off right front stage.)

Epilogue: The Spirit of Pontius Pilate comes on stage and addresses audience.

#### PLAYERS AND COSTUMES:

About 18 or 20 persons are needed for the skit. There are 11 speaking parts, none very long. Costumes should be simple. Pontius Pilate wears regal looking Roman toga. When he returns as ghost, this toga should be overlaid with white flowing gauze.

Special scenery is not needed. Several signs will suffice. They can be: Road to Emmaus, Jerusalem Street, and Judgment Hall. A curtain is necessary.

Characters with lines are:

- Cleopas
- Companion of Cleopas
- Spokesman of Mob
- Pilate, Pilate's Ghost
- First Soldier
- Second Soldier
- Soldier named Flavius
- Simon of Cyrene

Mary Magdalene  
Salome  
Other Mary

## SCRIPT

CLEOPAS: Come, my dear Companion, we must be on our way home now. It is some seven miles to Emmaus, and we can do nothing by staying here in the city. Talking of the sad things that happened in Jerusalem these past few days will not help. Though, truly Jesus was led as a lamb to the slaughter.

COMPANION: Yes. Cleopas, I know we should start our journey. Still, my heart is so heavy that all my strength seems to have gone from me. Let us rest here a little while before we go on.

*They sit down on a low bench.*

I keep thinking of how our chief priests and rulers handed Jesus over to be sentenced to death and of how cruelly He was treated. They crucified Him between two common thieves--of all things!--Our Friend, the perfect one, was so gentle, so kind. And we had trusted He was the one to redeem Israel.

CLEOPAS: The trials before the Council, before Pilate, and Herod, and then Pilate again--all of it was a farce, a mockery. I really thought for a while that Pontius Pilate was going to release Jesus.

COMPANION: I thought so too, especially after Pilate's wife sent that message while Pilate was sitting in the judgment seat. She said, "Have nothing to-do with this just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him."--I have reason to believe the wife of Pontius Pilate believed in Jesus.

CLEOPAS: She must have believed. Of course when Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent Him to Herod, because Galilee is in his jurisdiction. But Herod sent Him right back to Pilate.

But, ah, that ceremonial hand-washing Pilate did before the mob of people was too much! I can still see him now....

*Curtains open, showing crowd of people on back part of stage--waiting for Pilate to come out of the Judgment Hall. Have raised platform for Pilate and his attendants.*

SPOKESMAN OF MOB: Pilate will be coming out of the Judgment Hall any time now. We have our instructions. You know what to do. The Council and the high priests want us to yell out for Barabbas to be turned loose and for Jesus to be crucified. Otherwise, Pilate might just let Jesus go.

From what we hear, Pilate is in no mood to put Jesus to death. But, he's so wishy-washy and so afraid of losing his position, he can be persuaded.

Ah, here he comes! Get ready!

*Pilate enters, addresses Mob*

PILATE: You have brought Jesus which is called the Christ to me, as one who is misleading the people. Behold, I have just examined Him in the Judgment Hall. And, I found no fault in him. I will therefore chastise him, and release Him.

MOB: Away with that Jesus! Crucify him!

PILATE: I find in him no fault at all. But you have a custom that I should release unto you one prisoner at the Passover. Whom will you that I release unto you at this feast? Barabbas, the notorious robber, or Jesus of Galilee?

MOB: Barabbas! Release Barabbas, the robber!

PILATE: What shall I do then with this Jesus whom you call "King of the Jews?"

MOB: Nail him to the cross!

PILATE: Why, what evil hath he done?

MOB: Crucify him! Crucify him!

SPOKESMAN: If you let him go, you are not Caesar's friend! Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar!

PILATE: Ah, I suppose so. *Whirls around to call servant. Bring water! Washes hands in bowl. Dries them on towel held by servant.* I am innocent of the blood of this just person. This is your doing! Let Jesus of Nazareth be scourged, and, crucified!

*Curtain closes. Cleopas and Companion talk on.*

CLEOPAS: Another thing I couldn't understand: There was no reason for the Roman Soldiers to mock Jesus after He was turned over to them.

COMPANION: None. And later they were laughing about it. I can't forget hearing some of them talk just before they were ready to take Jesus and the other two prisoners to the place of the crucifixion.

*Curtains part, showing three Roman soldiers talking together. One holds Jesus' robe.*

1<sup>ST</sup> SOLDIER: I'll be glad when my assignment here in Jerusalem is over! Many more details like this one this morning I couldn't take!

2<sup>ND</sup> SOLDIER: Aw, come on! It's just going to be another crucifixion. Only difference is today we've got three of them to hang up--two Jerusalem thieves and some carpenter from Nazareth. I think his name is Jesus.

Wow! Did we have fun mocking him! *Turns to First Soldier* You ought to have been there! Flavius, here, plaited a crown of thorns, and somebody brought out a scarlet robe to put on him. And I got a reed and stuck it in his right hand!

Ha! What a sight! We all bowed the knee before him and chanted: "Hail, King of the Jews!"

*Soldier does pantomime to show how he knelt.*

FLAVIUS: I wish now I hadn't put that crown of thorns on his head.

1<sup>ST</sup> SOLDIER: Why?

FLAVIUS: Well, when I mashed it down on his forehead, he looked to me so strangely--as if he had great pity for me.

1<sup>ST</sup> SOLDIER: Forget it! Say, what've you got there? It looks like a good robe.

FLAVIUS: It is. It's the robe of that Jesus. I don't know what to do with it.

2<sup>ND</sup> SOLDIER: Give it to me. I can use it!

1<sup>ST</sup> SOLDIER: Well, now, if anybody is going to get his garments, it's going to be me! After all, I'm in charge!

FLAVIUS: We could divide all his clothes among us. There'll be one more soldier assigned to help, and we could split the garments four ways. But it would be a shame to cut this nice robe. It doesn't have a seam in it. *Holds up robe* Let's cast lots.

2<sup>ND</sup> SOLDIER: Good idea. But we don't have time for that right now. You just hold on to the robe till we get the prisoner on the cross. We'll have plenty time to roll the dice while we wait for him to die.--You know, those crosses are heavy. I just wonder if this so-called "King of the Jews" is going to be able to carry his. Pilate had him flogged unmercifully.

*Simon of Cyrene approaches.*

1<sup>ST</sup> SOLDIER: I see the answer to that problem coming up the street right now. Just let me handle him.

1<sup>ST</sup> SOLDIER: Halt! Your name?

SIMON: I'm Simon of Cyrene. I'm a stranger in Jerusalem.

1<sup>ST</sup> SOLDIER: Well, now, that's very interesting! But you're no longer a stranger. You just volunteered to join a band of Roman soldiers! We've been ordered to crucify three prisoners. And we're going to let you carry the cross for one of them!

SIMON: But I-- I-- I'm just a stranger. I don't even know who's being crucified! I don't want--

1<sup>ST</sup> SOLDIER: Never mind what you want! Or what you don't want! Come on! *Grabs Simon and compels him to move along.*

*Curtains close. Cleopas and Companion talk on.*

CLEOPAS: When the terrible darkness and the earthquake came, those same soldiers and their Centurion were crying: "Truly this was the Son of God!"

COMPANION: At least our Master had a decent burial.

CLEOPAS: Yes, I was glad when I heard that Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea, asked Pilate for the body and laid it in his own new tomb. And he rolled a large stone unto the door of the Sepulcher.

COMPANION: You heard, too, didn't you, that Mary Magdalene and some of the other women had planned to go to the tomb this morning. They were to take more burial spices.

*Curtains open, showing three women hurrying along, with small containers in their hands. They talk as they go.*

MARY MAGDALENE: I'm glad we decided to rise early to take these burial ointments.

SALOME: Do you know exactly which tomb it is?

OTHER MARY: Oh, yes. We made sure of that. We stood in the garden and watched to see where they laid Him. It's a new tomb, hewn out of the rock.

MARY MAGDALENE: Oh, I just happened to think! Who will roll us away the stone?

*Curtains close. Cleopas and Companion rise and start walking off right side of stage, following road signs to Emmaus.*

CLEOPAS: Come, let's us go. I can think of these tragic things no more.

### Epilogue

*The Spirit of Pilate comes to the front of the stage and addresses audience. At first, he is calm. Toward the last he becomes quite agitated. Finally, almost wild.*

SPIRIT OF PILATE: Good Morning, my Modern-Day Ones! Take a good look at me and say to yourselves, "Oh, we're seeing the ghost of Pontius Pilate!"

So you are--or, we'll say that you are. As the Spirit of Pontius Pilate I'll ask you three questions and tell you more than three things.

You are all Christians, believers in Christ! If you were not, you wouldn't be here this morning, breaking bread together, and talking and reading and remembering how Jesus, God's son, was crucified. You'd be somewhere else, doing something else.

And, each of you has two hands ... most people do. It's about being a Christian and about those hands that I put now the questions to you!

Will you be like Simon of Cyrene, who was compelled to bear the cross? That is, will you do just what you have to do for Christ's sake? No more?

Will you be like the Roman soldiers, who took advantage of the situation and got what they could--the garments, the robe? That is, will you accept all the fringe benefits that come from living in a Christian land, and never lift your finger to promote Christ's kingdom and to show His love, His mercy, His saving power, to others?

Or, will you be like the Galilean women who prepared sweet spices? It is the lot of women such as you to be in a position to do for Christ the little things. When I was yet procurator in Jerusalem, Jesus was teaching His disciples that the giving of a cup of cold water in His name would bring its reward.

Water?

Did I say water?

I must go find water! I must wash clean my hands!

*Starts pacing up and down, wringing hands. Quickens tone of speech.*

I adjure you not to do as I did! Do not wash your hands of Christ!

I bid you fold your hands in prayer that God will show you how to use your hands for Him.

Daily He will give you the choice. You must decide between useful, praying hands and idle, guilty hands that must be washed!

*Spirit of Pilate turns around quickly, crying out.*

Bring me water! Bring me water! Bring me water!

*He rushes off stage.*

Final Curtain

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