

ASHES FOR REMEMBRANCE

By Carl Kelly

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PUBLISHED BY
ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY
Tallahassee, FL 32317
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STORY OF THE PLAY

"Ashes for Remembrance" is a series of seven short monologues intended for use in worship during the Easter season. Seven biblical persons speak to us from their various perspectives in language that sounds honest and real. Job tells us why he sits and daubs ashes on his forehead every year. It is such a strange thing to do! A Samaritan woman, Peter, Thomas, Martha, and a Christian centurion, all relate some of their experience of Jesus and how they have reacted. Finally, Mary, the mother of Jesus, asks what only a mother can ask, "Oh, my very precious child, what have they done to you?"

You'll find these monologues thought-provoking and inspiring, and you will appreciate the author's notes on making inexpensive costumes for biblical characters.

SETTING/COSTUMES

Sets are not required, props are few, and costumes are simple for these monologues. All of the men may use the same tunic and all of the women may use the same dress as the basic part of each costume, then accent with a scarf or cincture.

PROPS

Job - Sackcloth, bowl of ashes.

Peter - Fishing net.

Thomas - Wooden mallet or carpenter tool.

Centurion - Leather armor, short sword.

JOB

“EVERY YEAR IN SACKCLOTH”

(AT RISE: JOB is seated CS on the floor, wearing a simple tunic made of sackcloth. He is daubing ashes from a bowl onto his forehead, and speaking to the audience.)

Sackcloth and ashes I wear this day, and you ask why I should wear them, a wealthy and pious man. Listen, I will tell you. Seven sons, three daughters I had. Seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred she asses. And servants. I had servants to do the work on my land. And land I had! From horizon to horizon, there to there, I had land, and houses and barns and sheds and tools. I had...I had. *(Pauses in thoughtful memory.)*

Gone. All gone. The Lord - may his name be blessed - took it all away as a test. To test my faith he took it. Took everything with winds and fire and earthquake and raids by foreigners. *(Takes pride in the next comment.)* But, I was still faithful. “I was naked when I was born; I will be naked when I die,” I said. “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken. The Lord’s name is holy.” That’s what I said. I thought I meant it. But, the Lord wasn’t finished testing me, yet.

He covered my body with sores, loathsome, seeping sores. From the top of my head, *(HE touches the top of his head, winces remembering the pain.)* ahh, to the bottom of my feet, sores. All over my body, sores. I couldn’t stand. I couldn’t lie down. I couldn’t sit. But, I sat anyway. In the ashes I sat, wearing sackcloth to show God my mourning for all he had taken away, to show God my faith.

My wife was furious, angry with God. “Do you still believe in this God of yours?” she taunted me. “Better you should curse such a God.”

“Oh, foolish woman! God gives good things. Shouldn’t he also give us evil? He is still God,” I said. May his name be blessed. I sat there in my ashes and sackcloth.

She walked away and sat grumbling where the front porch of my house used to be. (*Indicates direction.*) I sat and waited for God to do something. She sat and watched. How long? I don't know how long. But, soon my friends came to console me. Some consolation! They sat, too, silent as stones. Seven days and seven nights they sat saying nothing.

Then, I had it with silence. My wife was saying nothing. My friends were saying nothing. The Lord was saying nothing. So, I spoke. "I wish that I had never been born. May the day of my birth be taken off the calendar. Rip it out."

Then, my friends spoke, my good friends who sat seven days silent. They all spoke one at a time, but they all said the same thing. "Job, you know how it is with God. He rewards good people with good things and wicked people he punishes with bad things."

"Yes," I agreed. "That's what they say about God." "Well, then, Job, you must have done something horrible for God to punish you this much." "I haven't sinned," I told them. "I haven't done anything wrong."

"Well, maybe you don't remember it. Or, maybe you didn't know it was wrong. You did something. That's certain," my friends asserted.

"I am righteous," I insisted. "I have kept the Law. I observe all the rituals, keep the fasts, perform the sacrifices. And, not only for myself, but also for my sons and daughters, just in case they have done something wrong."

But, my friends insisted again, "You have sinned somehow, Job. There's no other explanation."

"No!" I ranted and raved. "I have done everything that God demands of a man and more. I am blameless. I don't deserve this calamity. I don't deserve this hardship and tragedy in my life. There's got to be a mistake."

"What's that?" my friends all three asked together. "What did you just say, Job?" (*Quietly, thinking about it.*) "There's got to be a mistake. That's what I said."

"A mistake?" All three of them were shocked. "The Almighty - may his name be blessed - never, Job, not the

Almighty.”

“Yes, a mistake,” I said. I was seeing it in a way I hadn’t thought of before. “Of course. I know I am righteous, so God must have made a mistake.”

My friends looked at me slack-jawed, wide-eyed in disbelief. Then, the wind began to blow hard, swirling dust and ashes around us. The sky darkened till I could see nothing, and out of that whirl of wind there was a voice.

“Who are you who darken discussion with empty, foolish words?” It was the Almighty himself. I was dumb. I buried my head in my lap. (*Buries head in lap.*) “Stand up like a man and learn,” the Almighty said. I stood up. (*Stands up.*)

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Did you watch as I stretched out the sky? Do you know these things? Do you know anything? Who are you to accuse God of anything? Who are you to question what I do?”

I stood there as slack-jawed and wide-eyed as my friends. The wind of dust and ash whirled about my head. My whole body reeled. (*Thoughtful, over-awed.*) This was the Almighty. Then I repented my arrogant speech. “I have no right to question anything you do or say, Oh Lord. I have spoken foolishly and stupidly. You are God; I am man.” That’s what I said.

Then the Lord - may his name be blessed - did a strange and wonderful thing. He ordered my friends to make a sin offering of seven bulls and seven rams because they had spoken wrongly about God. He ordered me to pray for them and promised to hear my prayer. And, the Almighty returned everything to me that he had taken away. (*Overcome by it all, HE pauses in joy.*)

So, why am I here in sackcloth and ashes, you ask. To remember. Every year on this day I wear sackcloth and ashes to remember who the Almighty is, and also to remember who I am. I am dust and ash. From dust I come and to dust I shall return.

(*HE sifts through the ashes with one hand as he exits.*)

THE END

SAMARITAN WOMAN

“COME SEE THE MAN”

(AT RISE: A WOMAN runs on. She is dressed in the plain long dress and shawl typical of Middle Eastern women. She speaks excitedly.)

Come with me to Jacob's well. Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did. He knew all about my life and nobody ever told him. I don't know how. He just knows. Is it possible this man could be the Messiah? *(Speaks less excitedly as SHE begins to tell her story.)*

Listen. I walked way out to Jacob's well to draw water and this man was sitting there beside the well. I knew he was a Jew right away because he wore those long fringes they wear on their robes. He's not just any Jew, but a very pious one to wear those fringes. I couldn't figure out what such a pious Jew was doing in Samaria, but I wasn't about to ask. I didn't expect he'd want to talk with a Samaritan woman. I know the Jews think we Samaritans are scum. They avoid us if they possibly can. The really pious ones don't even talk to their own women, let alone a Samaritan woman! So, I just went about my business of drawing water.

I think he must be an important man, at least a prophet, maybe the Messiah. So, this important and pious Jew spoke to me. He said, "Give me a drink of water." I was shocked. I couldn't believe he was talking to me. I looked around to see if there was anybody else there he could be talking to. No one was there. I mean, sure he was thirsty sitting out there in the heat of the midday sun. He didn't have a bucket or a jar or anything to draw water with. So, he spoke to me and I almost dropped my water jar. I steadied myself, dipped a drink, and held it out to him. I looked at him and he didn't look stern or angry like some of their important men. So I thought, "What have I got to lose?" and I said, "You are a Jew. How is it you ask a Samaritan woman for a drink?"

End of Freeview

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