

FIRST EASTER

A Collection of Holy Week Dramas for performance singly or
as a series

By
Les Ellison

© Les Ellison 2000

First published by Nimbus Press 2000. Reprinted 2002

This version (revised) first produced in typescript form in 2004 by Radius

All rights whatsoever in this play are strictly reserved. Permission for this play to be copied for purposes of a public reading or performance has been given but with the stipulation **that the copies be destroyed after use.**

A licence to perform or give a reading of this play, either in its entirety or in the form of excerpts, is required by professionals or amateurs for production in church or elsewhere, whether for charity or gain, regardless of whether admission is charged or not.

A scale of fees is linked to such a licence and is subject to contract and subject to variation at the sole discretion of Radius. Applications for a licence should be made to Radius in advance of rehearsals.

Radius

The Religious Drama Society of Great Britain

E-mail: sales@radiusdrama.org.uk web: www.radiusdrama.org.uk



FIRST EASTER

(Winner of the Nimbus Press playwriting competition 1999)

Introduction

There is a difficulty in presenting something meaningful to the two distinct audiences that appear in front of church based drama groups. They are, in no particular order, the un-churched - perhaps the people with whom we should be most concerned, and the in-churched - the people most likely to perform the dramas and make up most of the audience. The former cannot be expected to have the internal 'database' of religious knowledge and experience with which to interpret the meaning of what is presented, neither should they be expected to possess the reverence for the material that the latter might have and sometimes insist upon. The writer, therefore, is trying to satisfy two very different interests. If the balance is wrong, then the outcome might seem propagandist to one group and blasphemous to the other. Worse still, the resulting performance might seem bland to both. Of course a really well written piece will prove challenging to both audiences and this must be the aim of the church based writer, however difficult that might be.

Whether or not First Easter succeeds against this measure will depend on the individual groups considering a performance of one or more of the pieces. They will have to take a view of their own audience and decide where to pitch their performance. It might be necessary to 'edit' the script to meet the audience on their home ground. To play up or play down the humour, the irreverence, the unconventional. Though I would warn against underestimating any audience's need to be stimulated with new ideas. After all, even the traditional Easter story was once shockingly new.

It should be the aim of a church group, whatever the make-up of their audience, to present something new, and not simply to restate the accepted interpretation of the official version. The first century Easter must be made relevant to the lives of ordinary twenty-first century people or we, the tellers of the story, condemn it to the fate of the legend and fairy tale. This is the challenge for theatre in the church today. First Easter, in this new version for Radius, is meant only to assist committed church drama practitioners in meeting that challenge.

Les Ellison 2004

THE CATERERS

Some religions have a great culture of creating images of the object of their worship. Others forbid any attempt to make a physical representation of their divinity. Christianity has, over the centuries, moved between the two extremes; from the rich iconography of the eastern churches to the strict iconoclasm of the western Puritans. Christians of all traditions look to Jesus for a true representation of what God is like. Not in his physical appearance, but in his nature.

CATERER: *(rushing into the kitchen and carrying a tray with bottles of wine, some glasses etc.)* Hannah. Hannah!!

HIS WIFE: *(off.)* I'm busy!

CATERER: We are now. Upstairs room. We've got a party in for Passover.

HIS WIFE: *(enters carrying a bowl, some towels, etc.)* What? You might have told me.

CATERER: I am telling you. *(hurriedly preparing the wine and glasses)*

HIS WIFE: You might have told me before.

CATERER: I didn't know before. Look, I'll see to the wine. You wash the greenfly off those herbs. And get some bread cut up.

HIS WIFE: Passover. *(preparing the food)* Thought it was supposed to be a holiday.

CATERER: It is a holiday. It's a celebration of our exodus from slavery. In Egypt. It doesn't do to forget things like that.

HIS WIFE: Well I can't say I've noticed much difference. Except for the absence of pyramids, of course.

CATERER: Don't be ungrateful.

HIS WIFE: Who's to blame, anyway?

CATERER: For the pyramids?

HIS WIFE: For this. *(the work)* Who's got the upstairs room?

CATERER: Oh, I don't know. Rough lot. Galileans by the sound of them.

HIS WIFE: I hope they paid in advance. *(then loudly, so those in the upstairs room might hear)* We're not a charity you know.

CATERER: Ssh... It's a celebration. When God was good to us. It doesn't hurt to show a bit of goodness to someone else now, does it?

HIS WIFE: And what's God doing for us, eh? Where is he now? That's what I'd like to know.

CATERER: Well he's... busy.

HIS WIFE: Busy?

CATERER: Yeah. Managing things. On a grand scale.

HIS WIFE: Yes? Well he wants get down here and see what he's brought us to.

CATERER: You can't blame him for the Romans. It's not his fault, he's not like that.

HIS WIFE: What is he like then?

CATERER: What?

HIS WIFE: God. What's he like, then?

CATERER: I don't know. I don't think we're supposed to know. It's a... well, it's a mystery. Yeh, that's right... a mystery.

HIS WIFE: That's a cop-out. I want to see him. I want to see him as he really is.

CATERER: You don't half go on sometimes.

HIS WIFE: You know what it's like when you're just looking. Not at anything in particular: just looking. And suddenly you find yourself looking *at* someone. Perfect stranger. Straight into their eyes. You take them, and yourself, completely by surprise. And for a split second you see them as they really are. Just being themselves. And then they realise you're looking at them and they look away, or put up a paper. That's how I want to see God.

CATERER: You don't know what he looks like. I mean, just suppose you did find yourself looking into his eyes. How would you know it was him? *(picks up the basin and jug)* Pass us that towel. *(throws the towel*

over one shoulder) I could get really worried about you.

(Leaves)

HIS WIFE: I'd know it was him. Even for a split second. I'd see it in his eyes. And he'd know I'd seen him too. *(arranges food and wine on tray)*

CATERER: *(returns without bowl, towel, etc. chuckling to himself)* Oh, dear, oh, dear. Talk about embarrassment.

HIS WIFE: What?

CATERER: They're waiting to see who's going to wash the feet. They know somebody's got to do it, but no one's going to volunteer.

HIS WIFE: Why don't they just wash each other's?

CATERER: Can't do that. That would establish a hierarchy. No, their boss'll sort it out. He'll detail someone to do it.

HIS WIFE: Which one's he then?

CATERER: The one sitting there watching them. Take the food up, will you. Then we can put our feet up for bit.

HIS WIFE: Yeh, alright.

(Picks up the tray with bread, wine, etc. and leaves)

CATERER: Washing feet. What an awful job... Dear, oh, dear. *(pours wine for two)*

HIS WIFE: *(enters wearing a stunned expression. She holds a piece of broken bread)*

CATERER: Hannah?

HIS WIFE: *(sits. Caterer gets a chair under her just in time)*

CATERER: Hannah? What's the matter?

HIS WIFE: *(calmly)* I've just looked into the eyes of God.

CATERER: What...? Up there?

HIS WIFE: Yes.

CATERER: In our room?

HIS WIFE: Yes.

CATERER: What's he doing up there?

HIS WIFE: Washing feet.

CATERER: What? No, no, no. Not washing feet. I mean, he's the manager. He supervises. You'd never see God doing anything like that.

HIS WIFE: No you wouldn't. Because that's not the God you're looking for. But it's what he does even when no one's looking. It's what he's really like. Just... there. Coat off, sleeves rolled up, towel 'round his waist. On his knees, washing feet.

CATERER: Did he... say anything?

HIS WIFE: What was there to say? He knew I'd seen him. In that split second. I could see it in his eyes. Eyes that see one end of the world to the other. But in this moment, here and now, just him looking at me looking at him.

CATERER: And then what.

HIS WIFE: And then I looked away. (*knowing she too has been seen as she really is*). Why should God want to get involved with something like washing feet?

CATERER: It's all part of the mystery, I expect.

HIS WIFE: Or it's all part of the explanation. Sharing our lives so we can share his.

CATERER: Well I can see how he shares our lives. But how's he going to share his with us.

HIS WIFE: (*She shrugs her shoulders, breaks the bread in two and gives half to Caterer and accepts from him a glass of wine*)