



The Lenten Series

by Gail Keffer

This series is written in first person of the character as he/she may have felt at that time. These were first designed for use on a church web site to offer a weekly devotional. The questions are given to help develop questioning in our minds and lead to a further understanding of the way that particular character(s) applies to our everyday life. We have found that the series for Advent has also been used as a monologue or conversation in a short one-act play, and some churches have printed them and passed them out to the church members for personal devotions. Some have also used them as a group Bible study with questions leading to discussions.

This could also be presented as a small skit to lead into a discussion of the part each one had in the Easter story.

I feel that there is a place for almost everyone in the story of Christ's death, so study of it helps us to find what is expected of us for the spreading of His Word today. All of us are tempted daily and sometimes we also deny Christ or do not take the opportunity to spread the Good News. We are all sinners. Sometimes we want to give and do so generously. Sometimes we just take. Sometimes we run. The series concentrates on, Peter, Pilate, a Roman Soldier, the thief on the cross, Joseph of Arimathaea, Mary Magdalene, and Judas.

I realize there are more than the needed number to have one for each week, but the people can choose which ones they want to study or do two some weeks. I feel that each one listed is important for our knowledge of the death of Jesus Christ.

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Peter

“Just then a rooster crowed. Peter remembered what Jesus had said: "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." He went out and cried and cried and cried.” John 26:75

“I had been to the mountain top. I knew Jesus as a personal friend and Lord. I was sure that he was the Messiah. I had everything going for me, but I still had that human weakness. Maybe I was really afraid for my life, deep down. I felt sure the authorities were going to kill Jesus. I didn't know why exactly. I knew that many people were following his teaching. I may have been so stupid in my humanness to think that if I pretended I didn't know him, I wouldn't be killed with him.

“On that eventful night in Gethsemane, Jesus told us that things were going to get tough, but that we did not have to worry. I immediately spoke up and assured him that even if everyone else turned against him, I would not. I would always believe. He told me that I would deny him three times. This struck me deeply. I love him as Lord and Saviour. I told him I would die with him and the others agreed. Little did we know what would happen.

“Christ felt a need to pray and asked us to watch. I fell asleep; I should have been praying also. All he asked was for us to watch. What did we have to watch for? Nothing was going to happen. When he came back and saw us sleeping, he chastised me and told me I was weak. He didn't scold me, but he told me that a part of me was willing, but a part of me was also weak. And, when he left to pray again, I fell asleep again. Three times we fell asleep.

“Soon after he prayed, the authorities came with swords and clubs. Jesus didn't even put up a fight. I drew my sword and cut the ear of one of the Chief Priest's servants. Jesus told me to put the sword away, and then he healed the servant's ear. I had acted on impulse and been so foolish. I was afraid, and we ran for our lives. I followed at a distance just to see what was happening. I was a coward. They took him to Caiaphas the Chief Priest. Jesus answered the questions with the truth and that upset them even more.

“As I was sitting there, one of the servant girls came up to me and asked me if I had been with Jesus, the Galilean. I told her that I didn't know what she was saying. I denied him again and moved out of her eye sight. But, then another person recognized me and asked if I had been with Jesus the Galilean. Again I said that I had never even seen him. I didn't know what they were asking. Others asked me and said that my accent gave me away. I said again, 'I don't know the man.' I know they knew me. I was so afraid for myself, not for Jesus. Then the rooster crowed, and I wept. Jesus had known my weaknesses. But he forgave me, and I dedicated the rest of my life to telling others about this magnificent man from Galilee.”

Prayer: God, we know that you know our weaknesses, and we know that you know our strengths. We know that you do not expect us to be super humans, but only to do our best. Help us to stand up for you, to realize that you will always give us the strength and wisdom we need if we ask. Help us to lead our lives in daily communication with you. Amen.

1. Peter was the one chosen by Jesus to lead many people to eternal life. Why was Peter so weak when he needed to be strong?
2. Do we ever deny Christ? How?
3. When we are asked if we are a Christian, how do we respond?
4. Are we blessed so that we can be a blessing to others?
5. Faith is believing in what we cannot see or explain. Was that easy for Peter? Is it easy for you? For me?

Pilate

“Pilate went back out again and said to them, “I present him to you, but I want you to know that I do not find him guilty of any crime.” Just then Jesus came out wearing the thorn crown and purple robe.” John 19:4-5 THE MESSAGE

“As Governor I, Pilate, had a lot of authority and yet I was helpless when it came to releasing Jesus Christ from the men who wanted to kill him. I had been following the speeches and actions of this man as much as one could in my position, and my wife felt that he was telling the truth. When the high priests and religious leaders sent him to me, I was in an awkward situation.

“First they took him to Herod for questioning. Herod he did not want to make the decisions. He was brought to me. I asked him if he was King of the Jews. He did not answer me directly; he said “If you say so.” He put the whole thing on my shoulders. I wanted him to deny it. Then I could set him free and tell the religious leaders they didn’t have enough evidence to call for his crucifixion.

“Again I asked him as we both heard the cry of accusations from the high priests and leaders, “Do you hear that long list of accusations? Aren’t you going to say something?” If he would only defend himself. He said nothing. The more I tried to escape the situation, the deeper I was involved.

“My wife had sent me a message that she had a dream. She recommended that I get out of this somehow. She felt he was telling the truth, and that he was a noble man. I only saw one chance to set him free. It was the custom to release one prisoner at the time of the Passover Feast. I asked them if they wanted to release Jesus or a prisoner named Barabbas, who everyone knew was guilty. I realized that I had been set up; I was stuck in a very bad situation. The crowd had been coached by the high priests and religious scholars. They called out that they wanted me to release Barabbas. I asked what they wanted me to do with Jesus. They all wanted him crucified on the cross. I asked for what crime, but they only shouted louder. They had no cause, no reason. I was afraid. I knew now that he was really the one he claimed to be. He didn’t claim to be an earthly king. He was not a threat to us.

“I saw that I could not win; I washed my hands of the entire matter and told the crowd my decision. I did as much as I could to make them the judge for Jesus’ death. They weren’t concerned about the responsibility. They were willing to take the blame. I had only one choice – to release Barabbas and send Jesus to the cross.

“When they took him to Goliath, I made a sign saying “Jesus, the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.” It was written in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. The people would see it because many thronged to the hill to see the crucifixions. They tried to get me to change it to read that Jesus said he was King of the Jews. Then I was strong. I said “I have written what I have written.” I would not change it. I tried to do one thing right, but I did so many things wrong. Then they wanted to guard the tomb. I knew that he was safe, so I told them to do what they needed to do. Through His amazing grace I was forgiven.”

Prayer: Dear God who knows all and cares for all of us, help us to be strong enough to stand up for what we believe even though it may not be popular. Amen

1. Have you ever been challenged to stand up for your belief when it was not popular?
2. Can the leader of a country stand on his own personal belief? What if he is governed by a higher authority in another country?
3. What position do you have that puts you in a place comparable to that of Pilate?

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A Roman Soldier

“And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe,” John 19:2

“It must be known to all of you that a soldier does what he is commanded to do, particularly a Roman soldier. I was with John, who preached about his coming when some of us as soldiers asked what we should do when people wronged us. He had told us to do violence to no one, to never falsely accuse someone, and to be content with our wages.

“I had been hearing a lot about Jesus from many people. And, I was still unsure as to whether or not I believed what he was saying. Then one evening, we were called to go to the Garden of Gethsemane to seek out this man called Jesus. One of Jesus’ own men had decided to turn him over for thirty pieces of silver. The high priests and religious leaders were anxious to get him out of their way because it was near time for the Passover Feast, and they did not want any trouble with the crowds of people that would be in town. They felt that Jesus was one that could cause that trouble. We arrived with lanterns, torches and swords. Jesus asked whom we had come to see. One of the other soldiers said Jesus, the Nazarene. Jesus admitted that he was the one we sought. At this point, I became a believer. Who would openly and so freely admit that he was the one being sought for death if he were not? But, what could I do? I was only one of the soldiers. To admit my belief would have meant death, and it would not have helped Jesus.

“We tied him up and delivered him to Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas, the Chief Priest. From there we took him to the Jewish Council and then to Pilate. I did not harm him in any way. That was about all I could do.

“Pilate asked him if he was the king of the Jews. Christ said “If you say so.” There was a storm of negative comments, and I knew that Pilate also had some doubts about Jesus’ being a criminal. I feel that Pilate thought they had only brought Jesus to him for spite because they could not control this gentle man who caused no trouble, but was followed everywhere he went.

“The crowds would not release Christ. He was whipped, dressed in a purple robe. They beat him with a club, spit on him, mocked him and then put a crown of thorns on his head.

“We took Christ to Goliath to be crucified; he offered no resistance. I stood by and said nothing. I know I was a coward. One soldier pierced his side with a sword. Another took his clothes and divided them up four ways, but his robe was seamless. They decided to throw dice for it; all this at the foot of the cross where Jesus who was my Lord and Savior died. I have often wondered what I could have done differently. I heard him forgive those who had wronged him. I heard him ask for forgiveness for his enemies. I heard him say that we didn’t know what we were doing, and I believed him. I know that he has forgiven me.”

Prayer: Amazing God who forgives those who sin, those who seek, and those who don’t realize what they are doing wrong, we know that you will also forgive us for our sins. Dear Lord, please come into our lives and guide us today and every day. Amen

1. Are we ever put in a position where our life depends on our being a true witness for Christ?
2. Are we ever called on to forgive someone who has taken advantage of us or mistreated us either emotionally or physically? Do we ever need to forgive someone who tells lies about us?

The Thief on the Cross

“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”
Luke 23:43 KJV

“I had been a sinner all of my adult life. I had robbed people, rich and poor. I had taken advantage of people who tried to help me. I never killed anyone, but I probably would have if they would have been in my way. I needed their money, I thought. My language was only used to help myself. I was the only important person in the world. I had no friends. I had used them all. I deserved to die.

“As I listened to Jesus, I thought at first that I could use this man, just as I had used so many others. He was so mild that I felt a new feeling inside that I had never felt before. He truly seemed to love people. I did not know what love meant. I had never loved anyone except myself.

“There were two of us, one on each side of him. They had wanted to make him the prime target because getting rid of him was going to affect many people. The people in charge of the government were afraid of him. They misunderstood him.

“During the time that we were all hanging there together, the other robber started tormenting him by asking him to save himself and us if he were really the true Christ. I had begun to believe that he was the real Christ and I asked the other thief if he did not fear God because we were all being condemned to death. I realized from the people that were there and from hearing what had happened in the high court that this man was indeed innocent. No one came to try to save the other robber or me. No one cared what happened to us. We were receiving what we deserved. But this man was different. People were crying and praying. They were not violent. The people were heart broken. No one was breaking my heart, but I had broken the hearts of many other people by my words and my actions. His were words of kindness. He was concerned that someone take care of his mother, and he forgave the people who had put him on the cross saying that they did not realize what they were doing.

“I realized he really was the Messiah, the one he said he was. His kingdom was not of this small world, a much bigger world than any of us could even imagine in our wildest dreams.

“I asked him to remember me when he went to his Heavenly Kingdom. He didn’t even ask my name. Now I know that he knew it because he knows all of us. I know that he knows the flowers, the hair on our head. He knows what is in our hearts. We don’t have to tell him. He already knows. His answer was the sweetest words I have ever heard. He said, “Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise.” Through his loving grace he had saved a wretch like me.”

Dear God, We know that you alone are sinless. We have all sinned and fallen short of your glory. But through your love and grace we can be forgiven as long as we seek to put you first and ask you to help us. We can overcome anything this earth has to offer, even death. Help us, dear Lord, to be your servant today, tomorrow, and always. Amen

1. We may not be in jail, but have we hurt anyone by our words or actions?
2. How should we approach people that we know we have wronged?
3. How does the Bible say we should approach someone after we have hurt them?
4. Probably one of the most common hurts between people is gossip. How can we help this stop?
5. What do we share in common with the thief on the cross? If nothing else, do we share his earnest seeking for forgiveness and acceptance by Christ?

Joseph of Arimathaea

“And after this Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave. He came therefore, and took the body of Jesus.” John 19:38 KJV

“I am Joseph of Arimathaea. Much has been written about me, but I only did what any one in my position, with my beliefs, would have done. Before Christ was crucified, I had become a believer in what He was saying. I did not often openly acknowledge this when I should have because I, like many others, was afraid for my life. But after I saw what they were doing to him and how they treated him, I wanted to help in some way. By that time, the only way I could help was to offer a new tomb that had been hewn out of the rock for me.

“I knew Pilate, and I was a member of the Jewish Council. I was fairly well off, and I was not afraid to go to him. I felt that he had the same sympathy that I did for this wonderful man, Jesus. I petitioned Pilate to let me take the body and bury it in my own grave. Pilate questioned on how he could have died so soon, but after he received verification that what I said was true, he gave his permission.

“Knowing I was old and did not have much longer to live, I had also purchased a linen robe in which to be buried. Nicodemus, another man who believed Jesus was the Christ, came with a mixture of myrrh and aloes to prepare the body for burial. I wrapped the body of Jesus in the spices and the linen cloth and took it to my own tomb. Several of the women who also loved Jesus, including Mary Magdalene, Salome, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, watched as I sealed the tomb with a large rock that had been cut from the side of the hill. I knew that they had been followers of Christ and so did not feel they were intruding. They, like Nicodemus and myself, mourned his death.

“That was all that I did. I saw my Lord being mistreated, and was not able to help in any other way. Much has been written about me.

“Some say I was a member of the Sanhedrin and had voted for the death of Christ. Some say I had been imprisoned on Friday because of my beliefs in Christ and then miraculously escaped from prison to ask for the body of Christ. Some authorities believe that I took the Holy Grail, the cup which Christ used at the last supper he had with his disciples. Some say I took it to England and started the church there. Whatever, they say; I know that for too long I was silent. I realized that this man was truly Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Lord.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross and giving your life for us. Help us to realize that only because of your love for us did you come and suffer and die for us. Amen

1. As Joseph had been a secret admirer, do we sometimes believe in secret? Why are we afraid to let others know of our love for Christ?
2. Should we use our influence to spread the Gospel of Christ?
3. Does it have to be a rich person that comes to Christ's aid?
4. How can we help after his death to let others know of his love?

Mary Magdalene

“Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.” Mark 16:9 KJV

“I had been filled with what they called evil demons; I knew no good. I saw people throng around this gentle man who was speaking about a new heaven where all would be right; I wanted to know more. The more I listened to him, the more I realized that he was telling the truth. He was really not like anyone else I had ever seen. And believe me, I knew many people. I had used everyone I could just as they used me. One day I asked him to cast the evil spirits out of my body as he had done for others. That day I knew that he was the Son of God. He was the Messiah, the only one that could heal me.

“I continued to follow as many others did. We wanted to hear more. We all wanted to know as much as possible about this man who was so wonderful, who told us how we too could become a part of his Heavenly Kingdom. He healed people; he removed evil spirits. He made the lame to walk; he made the blind to see.

“When the authorities seized him and wanted to put him to death, we were all devastated. There was nothing we could do. He had told the disciples this would happen. They didn’t understand any more than the rest of us. He had taught us to be gentle, to forgive, as he had forgiven us.

“As I stood at the foot of the cross with the other people who also loved Jesus, I heard one of the centurions admit that he felt this man was truly the Son of God, but he also could do nothing to prevent what was happening. There were many of us there, both men and women.

“When he died, they cut the body down. A man named Joseph asked to have Christ’s body put into his own tomb. He and Nicodemus anointed the body with the proper oils, put him in linen clothes, and laid him in a tomb that had been recently hewn from the rock for Joseph. I along with a couple other women stood off and watched them as they took care of his body and then sealed the tomb.

“On Sabbath morning, I, along with the other Mary, went to the tomb. There was a great earthquake and the stone had rolled away. We were afraid. As we cried an angel told us not to be afraid. He told us that Jesus had risen from the dead. What a joy. Then I heard that familiar voice say “Mary”. The dimness from my eyes was lifted as I saw our risen Lord standing beside me. Tears returned to my eyes, but this time they were joyful tears. Jesus told us to not be afraid and to go and tell his disciples that he would see them in Galilee. The disciples also were shy, uncertain and confused when I told them. We had such great news. None of us would ever be the same again.”

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you have told us that you are always with us. In times of loss, we sometimes forget that you are still there. When we are frightened, we know in our hearts that you are there. Help us to be strong like Mary Magdalene and the disciples and be willing to do all that we can to help others know about you by our actions as well as our words. Amen

1. How are we like Mary Magdalene? How can we be a witness to others?
2. Is it right for us to seek to know the truth even though we may not feel we are good enough to be in the places where God’s word is taught because we do not have the right clothes or know the right people?
3. Do we ever turn others away by treating them like they are not good enough to be a part of our church?

Judas

“No sooner were the words out of his mouth than a crowd showed up, Judas, the one from the Twelve, in the lead. He came right up to Jesus to kiss him. Jesus said, ‘Judas, you would betray the Son of Man with a kiss?’” Luke 22:47 & 48 THE MESSAGE

“Why? Why? Men will ask, and I don’t know the answer, or do I. I had been with Jesus. I had seen him do miracles. I had been the one who wanted to help him buy this kingdom he was preaching. I wanted to be a part of the new life that was going to be better than anything any of us had ever known. One time when Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with expensive aromatic oil, I scolded her for using something so expensive to wash feet. I said it could have been sold and the money used to feed the poor, but I knew in my heart that it would bring as much as 300 pieces of silver, and I knew at that time that I was going to betray this man to the authorities in return for money. Money seemed to be my prime goal in life. It wasn’t the fault of the money, it was my over zealous love of money. I thought it held all the answers. Yes, I sounded as though I was concerned for the poor, but my only concern was for myself.

“Just a few days later, I had my chance. I knew that we were all going to meet for dinner. I had told the authorities that I would make sure there was an appropriate time for them to seize Jesus. I knew that we often went to pray in the garden, so putting all these things together, I knew the timing was right.

“As we were sitting at the dinner, Jesus told us that one of us would betray him. He knew and yet I still thought I could get away with it. Jesus said “The one to whom I give this crust of bread after I have dipped it will betray me.” He handed it to me. I knew that he knew, but I was helpless. My greed was so great. Then in a very quiet voice he told me to go and do what I had to do and get it over with. If any of them did hear they would have thought that I was going to do something like buying food. They knew I was the treasurer, but everyone trusted me, except myself.

“I went to the authorities and led a gang of soldiers and police that had been sent by the high priests and Pharisees. We all arrived with lanterns and torches and swords. We didn’t need any of those things.

“I went to Jesus and kissed him as I had told the authorities I would do. “Jesus asked who we were looking for and the authorities said “Jesus the Nazarene.” Jesus said he was the one and then they bound him and took him away. I stood out in the crowd as the one that had betrayed Jesus. I wanted to give the money back, but they wouldn’t take it. Sometimes we can’t undo what we have done. We need to think beforehand. I had committed an unpardonable sin as far as I was concerned. I was through.”

Prayer: Amazing God. You only ask that we believe in you, and yet sometimes it is hard. We want to think that we know what is best. We want to think that we can do it by our self. Help us to know that with you all things are possible, and that without you, we are lost. Amen.

1. Why did Jesus pick Judas as one of the disciples? Why did he allow him to handle the money?
2. We can say that Satan was in his heart, but do we have to allow Satan into our hearts. Can we keep him out? How?
3. Are we ever tempted to be like Judas?
4. Did Judas have free will to make his choice? Do we have free will?
5. If we do not have free will are those that have not accepted Christ doomed?

Notes: These references are given to help continuance of study for a particular person, and although the verse is given with the particular reference, the reader will find a need to read some verses on either side of the reference to put the name into context. Many books have been written on the people in the Bible and many sources are quoted every day. Some are mentioned very briefly, but they had a tremendous impact. I have tried to just list the Scripture references. Also, since this is written as monologues, I have taken a few liberties in their speeches.

Peter: (This is limited to his reference to the crucifixion) The main references to Peter and his time when Christ was crucified are found in the four Gospels. Matthew 26:33-75; Mark 14: 29-72; Luke 11:8-62 and Luke 24:12; and John 18:10-27 and John 20:2-6.

Pilate: Pilate's involvement in the crucifixion is chronicled in Matt 27:2-65; Mark 15: 1-44; Luke 23: 1-52; and John 18:29-38 and John 19:1-38. Paul makes reference to him in Acts 13:28 and I Timothy 6:13.

A Roman Soldier: Most information on the part of a Roman soldier in the crucifixion is based on what has been passed on. It may be true, it may not be. The only references to the soldiers at the time of the crucifixion are found in Matthew 8:9, Matthew 27:27; Matthew 28:12 and in Mark 15:16; Luke 3:4; and Luke 7:8; Luke 23:36, and in John 19:2-34.

The Thief on the Cross: These references are also scarce. The most information is found in Luke 23:30-43; Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27; John 19:28 and John 19:32. However, in John they are not referred to as thieves, but it does tell about their legs being broken by the soldiers.

Joseph of Arimathaea: References to Joseph are found in all four Gospels Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:43-46; Luke 23:50-53; and John 19:38-42.

Mary Magdalene: Mary Magdalene with references to the crucifixion are found in all four Gospels also. Matthew 27:56-61; Matthew 28:1; Mark 15:40-47; Mark 16:1-9; Luke 24:10; John 19:25; and John 20:1-18.

Judas: References to Judas and his part during the crucifixion are found mainly in Matthew 26:14-47; Matthew 27:3; Mark 3:19; Mark 14:43; Luke 22:3-48; John 13:2-29; and John 18:2-5.

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