

Early on Sunday Morning . . .

This sketch was first used for a large multi-church Easter Praise celebration held in at Hull City Hall in 2002.

It begins in the style of a serious “churchy” Easter play, but that’s before the director gets to work making “improvement”.

Voice) Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark . .

Mary walks across the stage, stopping in her tracks at the sight of the tomb. Runs across to Simon Peter and “other” disciple

Mary) They’ve taken our Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they’ve put him.

Voice) Then Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb.

Other disciple reaches the tomb first, looks in, Simon Peter arrives, goes in and looks at the cloths.

Voice) Mary stood crying outside the tomb.

Mary) They have taken my Lord from the tomb, and I don’t know where they have put him.

Jesus stands behind her.

Jesus) Woman, why are you crying? Who is it that you’re looking for?

Mary) Sir, if it was you that took him away, please tell me where you have put him.

Jesus) Mary.

Mary) Teacher

Mary moves to him

Voice) It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind closed doors.

Jesus) Peace be with you.

Voice) The other disciples told Thomas

Thomas) Unless I see the scars of the nails in his hands and put my finger on those scars, and my hand in his side, I will not believe.

Jesus) Put your finger here and look at my hands; then stretch out your hand and put it in my side. Believe.

Thomas) My Lord and my God

Jesus) Do you believe because you see me? How happy are those who believe without seeing me.

During all this, two people have been sitting and watching, and now begin to speak:

1) See what I mean? Absolutely useless

2) Well, the basic plotline is okay

1) You think so do you? Then you will have to direct this thing instead of me.

2) Don't be like that

1) Well how do you expect me to be? The situation is desperate, absolutely desperate

2) Well maybe if you just calmed down a bit, we could

1) Calm down? Calm down? Do you have any understanding of the mess we are in here?

Our reputation is on the line. The church has come to us, at great expense I might add, to put together this presentation to mark this special anniversary of the Easter events. They are relying on us to get it right. Look, here we are (*finding official letter*) "Dear Jerusalem productions, blah, blah, blah, as you may know the church has suffered a great decline in interest over the last few years, blah, blah, and we are hoping that a presentation of the miraculous events of that first Easter would remind people of the 'Greatest Story Ever Told'"

2) The Greatest Story Ever Told- that would make a great title for the presentation

1) Don't be so ridiculous – besides, it isn't the greatest story ever told

2) It sounded pretty good to me

1) Yes, and that's why I am the director and you are the assistant. It is flawed through and through. I mean to begin with it starts with the death of the hero, totally topsy-turvy. True tragedy ends with the death scene, I mean where can we take it from there?

2) But it gets really good after that. What about all those people who met him after he had died

1) Exactly, that's my point, what a bunch of losers

2) But people in the church love to read about his followers

1) Ah yes, but that's because they are all members of the same club, brand loyalty is a powerful thing, but our brief is to appeal to those outside the church, and for them these people have no credibility whatsoever. Believe me, I am used to creating great heroes, and these most certainly are not.

2) I don't get it

1) Right, well let's work it through then, shall we . . . From the top.

From here we see relevant parts of the scene re-enacted, and frozen whilst the 2 people talk

Voice) Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark . .

1) Mary, a major problem for us

2) Why? I think the audience will love her, she seems very sweet

1) Aha, but sweet is exactly what she is not. Wanton. That's what she is, wanton. The fallen woman – a great character for a performance, providing drama and passion. The audience may pity her, love her even – but trust her, no. Not until we have seen her change. Let's move on

Mary to disciples

Mary) They've taken our Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him.

Disciples begin to run, with Peter behind

1) No, no, no, no, no – it's painful to watch

2) Isn't Peter meant to be like the heroes right-hand man?

1) Exactly, every super hero needs a side-kick – but this one would still be putting his trainers on, whilst all the saving was being done. Shown up by a minor character? No, Joe Public just will not accept him

2) I suppose he could do with being a bit fitter

1) Memo to myself, contact personal trainer. Continue

Mary) They have taken my Lord from the tomb, and I don't know where they have put him.

1) Tears, pathos, at least that's something

Jesus) Woman, why are you crying?

1) Build up of tension, good

Mary) Sir, if it was you that took him away, please tell me where you have put him.

2) Mistaken identity, always a winner

Jesus) Mary

Mary) Teacher

Mary moves to him

1) Totally unacceptable. Joe Public will leave in droves. Where is the change? Where is the turning away from past misdemeanours? Where is the come-uppance? Desperate.

Voice) It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind closed doors

1) Worse and worse

2) Are they not allowed to be a bit scared?

1) Not if we want to show the church in any strength at all, no. How can the audience respect these supposed heroes when they act like cowards. This is turning into a farce, not an epic.

Thomas) Unless I see the scars of the nails

1) Cut!!

2) That whole speech?

1) No – that whole character. We are meant to be convincing people of the credibility of the events, and this is turning into a comedy of errors. No, we are going to have to shape him up, or ship him out. Well, I hope you are ready for a long night ahead

2) I suppose we do need to do a bit of re-drafting

1) We certainly do. I mean the basic gist is fine, amazing, miraculous even, but the surrounding characters just don't stand up to modern standards. Time has moved on. The audience is more discerning, and the story has got to move with the times. Look, watch this . . .

The following section has “big movie” written all over, in its acting style and accompanying soundtrack

Voice) Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark . .

Mary) Oh I just wish Jesus was still here. He will never know now the effect that He had on me. He'll never know how I have left behind my wanton ways, how I have repented of my past life and become a fine, upstanding and responsible member of society. How I am going to teach Sunday school and have gone onto the flower rota - all because of him.

Sees tomb, and runs to disciples

Mary) They've taken my Lord from the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him

Both) What?

Chariots of Fire music as they run in slow motion to the tomb, Peter easily faster than the other disciple

Mary at tomb

Voice) The new improved Mary stood crying outside the tomb

Jesus) Woman, why are you crying? Who is it that you're looking for?

Mary) Sir, if it was you that took him away, please tell me where you have put him.

Jesus) Mary

Mary) Teacher

Mary runs to him

Jesus) Just one moment, Mary. Have you made full confession for your past mis-deeds? Have you repented of your sins, and paid your debt to society? Are you a member of the local congregation? Do you love small children and fluffy Easter chicks?

Mary) Yes

Jesus) Mary

Mary) Teacher

She runs towards him

Voice) It was late that Sunday evening, and the disciples were gathered together behind closed doors, having spent a full day outside running missions and street evangelism

Jesus) Peace be with you – any questions? Thomas?

Thomas) No – I have no reason to doubt that you are alive and well. Don't need to know the facts and figures, just need to have faith. That's all any of us need.

Jesus) Peace be with you

1) *wiping the tears from their eyes* Marvellous, a masterpiece, even if I do say so myself. Come on then, tell me you didn't love it. Tell me, it won't have them flocking into church

2) It was great, yeah, really good. I mean it had strong characters, an engrossing plot, a very happy ending

1) but . . . ?

2) but, well, I can't help thinking that we've missed the point a bit

1) Missed the point, what on earth can you mean?

2) Well, it's just that I've always thought that, well, that an incredible part of the Easter story, the Gospels, in fact, are the flaws in the people involved.

1) I have no idea what you are talking about

2) Well, for me, the fact that the followers weren't perfect gives me hope, reminds me that Jesus came for the lost, the fallen, the questioners, the weak, the outcasts. He came for them, He died for them, He poured out his love and acceptance on them, and then I get to thinking, there's maybe room in that story for me....Do you see?

Long silence

1) No, can't say I do, you've obviously fallen into the first trap of production, getting too emotionally attached to the subject matter. Trust me, I know what I'm doing. The churches are not as full as they used to be, and it's our job to produce a version that is credible to today's audience, and at this time, on the tenth anniversary of that first Easter, the church stands in crisis. Believe me, if we stuck with the original, the church will be dead in another ten years. I mean come on, think about it, your little tale of loving the lost, where's the power in that?
