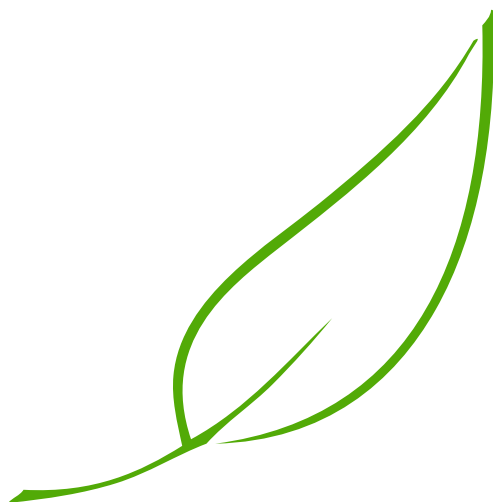


THE BYSTANDERS

by Ken Bradbury



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Former President Ronald Reagan once paid a visit to our little school tucked into the Illinois cornfields. School was cancelled for the day for security reasons and we were allowed to have one school employee in the building. Dick Lippert, the school custodian was chosen to man the building on the day Reagan's Marine One helicopter landed on the football field.

That evening the network news gave us a 3 minute blip of his visit, his speaking in front of a load of corn, and a brief shot of him driving a John Deere tractor. That was it. For the real story I quizzed Dick the janitor.

Dick told me about Marine One and the backup, Marine Two, landing on the field, the secret service agents running along the President's awaiting limousine, our state's governor coming in the building to use the restroom, the soldiers who remained to guard the helicopter as Reagan was whisked off for his speech, and the technicians from CBS, NBC, and ABC who had spent the day hooking up their phone lines in our superintendent's office. Dick even managed to wander out to the helicopter, got a private tour and a deck of playing cards with the Presidential seal.

In short, the most fascinating story of the day came from a character whose name never made the official reports...a bystander.

The scriptures often speak of the throngs of people who were in attendance in so many events of Christ's life and ministry, but we read none of their stories and we know very few names. One can't help but wonder what insight they might give us into this most remarkable of lives.

The Bystanders is a collection of monologues by those people. Of course they are mostly imagined but logic would tell us that these people were present. None of them is specifically named in the scripture, although some, such as the mother-in-law of Peter, are indicated.

The separate monologues may be presented in any order. In fact, they need not be presented together. Each stands on its own with the figure of Christ being the only thing they have in common.

They are presented here in an order that will give the performance a variety and flow, but the pieces may be easily rearranged. Biblical costuming is appropriate but perhaps contemporary clothing would play better. Also, a bit of music between scenes would provide some nice transitions.

I hope that in your presentation your audience will comfortably ease into the role of bystanders. After all, that's what we are.

Ken Bradbury

THE SCENES:

The Manager...an adult male, a no-nonsense manager of the
Upper Room

The Buddy...an adolescent boy

The Neighbor...a young mother

The Mother in Law...female, feisty, and age is an asset

The Frontrunner...an impetuous young girl

The Merchant ...a fiery adult male

The Grounds Keeper ...a male, a bit more rough-hewn than
the rest

The Keeper of the Cloth...an adult female, middle aged or
older

THE MANAGER: (*enters, looks around*) Well, it's not as bad as I thought. You wouldn't believe the messes I have to clean up after some groups. (*picks up a piece of bread*) Strange ones.

I rent this place out for bar mitzvahs and parties and suppers. It's a good location. Up high above the streets. Away from the smell. (*continues to generally pick up the area... a few pillows, some plates.*) It's a good rental property. Low maintenance, good profit. It pays to advertise.

So this guy ... John ... comes to me and says he needs a place to celebrate Passover with a few of his friends. Not exactly family like most of my groups. Just a group he's been hanging around with I guess. A club maybe? Like the Kiwanis? He said all they need is a room and I say, "Sure, I've got the room, but it'll cost you," and he says, "That's fine. How much?" And I told him and he said that'd be fair. "But you gotta put down a deposit," I told him. I've had groups do some real damage up here. He laughed and said there'd be no damage. Yeh, that's what they all say. But you know. I believed him. I didn't ask for a deposit. Had to lie to my wife. She'd have screamed her head off ... thinks I'm a soft touch.

So they got here at ... I don't know... just before sundown. Scraggly-looking group, but peaceful, I guess. Weird. They were loud and joking when they walked in but on the way out ... I don't know. Like something had happened. I guess it did.

I mean, in the first place, they didn't have any servants. You can't do a banquet without servants. I got servants you can rent but they said they didn't need them. So asked, "Who's gonna wash the guests' feet?" I mean, that's custom ... your servant washes the feet of your guests. So they got here ... and you're not gonna believe this ... but the head guy. The one with the eyes ... man, those eyes ... the head guy, he takes off his cloak and grabs the wash basin and he washes the feet of the others. I couldn't believe it. I asked myself, "Just what makes this guy the boss when he's doing all the work?" Like I told you ... strange group. And the others ... this embarrassed them, I guess. I mean, with no servants, they should have washed his feet but he wouldn't have it. It really got them. They didn't know how to act and kept saying, "No, it's us who ought to be washing your feet," but he just smiled and went onto the next set of feet. And his eyes ... you ought to have seen his eyes.

Now, my wife's a good caterer. She's got her Class One License. I mean, anything you want, Naomi can whip up. A whole calf? She's won prizes with her Veal Jerusalem. Chickens, roast lamb ... anything but pork. We don't move much pork at Passover. But these guys brought their own ... mostly bread and wine and a little fruit. I stuck my head in a couple of times...they asked me to eat with them, but it's my busy season with everybody in town for the holiday. The head guy ... the guy with the eyes ... he sat about here ... and John, the fella who arranged for room, he was right beside him. I'd seen some of them around. I'm terrible at names, but there were some fishermen, an accountant, a tentmaker ... uh ... let's see ... a tax collector. Yeh, I remembered him. And one guy who made me nervous ... Simon. Yeh. Trouble maker. Not a buddy of the Romans. I'm surprised he was out of jail.

But it was a quiet group. They talked awhile then the head guy ... wish I could remember his name. A Nazarene. He started to talk and it got real quiet. I mean except him talking ... and looking at them with those eyes.

Okay, I'll come clean. I was listening right outside the door the whole night, okay? Is that a sin? Hey, I own this place. I got a right to know what's going on. This Nazarene...I'd heard of

him, I think ... seems real hot right now. He said ... (*reaches into his pocket*).. Okay, I won't lie. I wrote it down. He said, (*reading from his scribbled notes*) "I've really looked forward to eating this Passover supper with you before I start my suffering." That's exactly what he said, "suffering." I'm not sure they believed him. (*reading*) "But I won't eat it until it has come true in the kingdom of God." Tell you the truth, he started to lose me there. But it gets even stranger. Then he took his cup...okay, I actually peeked in. Remember, this is my place. He took the cup and said, (*reading*) "Take this and divide it up among you. I won't drink it until the kingdom of God comes." Then he picked up a loaf of bread and broke it and said, "This is my body which I'm going to give to you. When you do this again, remember me and what I said tonight."

You know, I've rented this place to some strange groups over the years and that's okay, long as they pay their rent. I mean we've had some weddings that went on for days. But this group ... this guy with those eyes ... they were different. Because then after they'd finished the meal he raised his cup again and said, "This is the new deal, friends. This wine is my blood ... a new contract just for you." (*looking up*) He said the wine was his blood. I'm not kidding. And he said, (*reading*) "And to make this all work ... to make everything complete, one of you is going to betray me." Well, for a minute you could have heard a pin drop. This guy wasn't pulling any punches. He just out and out said that one of them was going to turn him in. I don't know for what, but he knew it wasn't going to be good

It got noisier after that ... a lot noisier. First they started talking at once, telling him why they'd never betray him. I guess the accountant got tired of it because that's when he left. Then the others started arguing about who was going to be the greatest some day. And boy, that's when he stopped them cold. He told them that the greatest was going to be the least. That the biggest was going to be the smallest. He looked right at them with those piercing eyes of his and told them that only servants were going to be leaders and that so far, he was the only servant he saw that night.

Silence. Man, I mean there was a silence in that room. Lots of times it gets quiet up here but that's because everybody's drunk, but these guys ... these guys knew that they'd just been put into their place.

(walking around again, picks up a chalice) They left about an hour ago. A little place just outside the city walls next to Mt. Olive ... Gethsemane. Said they were going to spend the night there. They all thanked me as they left ... John was next to last and paid me ... even a little extra. Then the one ... the one with the eyes ... he was the last to leave.

He asked me what I thought of what I'd heard. I said, "Whatta you think I do, eavesdrop on people?" He looked at me ... one of those looks that you know you can't lie your way out of. He looked at me and said, "Yes."

What was I supposed to say? I just ... I just stared ... and he stared back. Then he smiled at me and ... this is the weirdest thing ... he smiled at me and I started to cry. I couldn't help it. Man, I mean the tears just wouldn't stop! And I don't even know why. It was like somebody just looked right down in my heart and saw everything about me ... and ... and loved me anyway.

And I don't drink. Not much anyway. I was stone sober and I stood there blubbering like a baby and I couldn't figure out why...but all the time I knew why. I knew that somebody was looking at me with a ... well, I'll say it ... a love that I'd never felt from any other person in the world. And ... and I cried.

He turned to go and then stopped. He turned around to me and by this time I was almost afraid to look into those eyes again ... But I did. And he smiled ... but ... *(coming to tears)* ... but he was crying, too. For me.

(a long moment as the manager stands there, lost in the memory of that moment) (then) I gotta get this place cleaned up. (he quickly picks up a handful of the things onstage and leaves)

THE BUDDY: *(an adolescent boy, running in)* Man, he's gonna be in trouble! I mean, if I pulled something like that I'd have got whipped good! And his parents are strict, too! And then what he said to them when he got caught! Man!

See, we were all in town for the Passover. It was really wild ... like a big party that goes on for days. I mean, we do the synagogue stuff, too, but mainly it's just a lot of fun.

So me and my friends were running around while our folks were out doing Passover business and suddenly he was just ... I don't know ... He was gone! I never saw him leave! Honest!

Me and Jacob were watching this guy with the trained doves and I turned around and said, "Hey Jesus, did you see that?" and ... he wasn't there!

It was like they thought I stole him or something! Mary and Joseph couldn't find him but they knew he was running around with me so my folks came to me and sat me down right in front of the market and started the third degree ...

"Where were you?"

"By the doves!"

"When did you lose him?"

"I didn't lose him!"

"Did he say where he was going?"

"I didn't even know he was gone!"

Like for about an hour. Heck, if I'd have known anything I'd have told them. He was my buddy! We played together ever since they came here from Egypt and we took instruction at the synagogue together. It was like we did everything together! Why would I want to lose somebody like that on purpose?

Hey! We're just twelve years old!

And the thing was ... when you go to Passover you go in a really big group of people ... maybe a couple hundred. You all go together and you all come back together and when our village met to go back, they thought Jesus was with me and I thought Jesus was with them ... and ... and ... well, it was just a mess.

We'd been gone a day on the road when they found out he was gone, and the whole caravan stopped dead and looked at me. Mary and Joseph went running back to Jerusalem, worried to death, and my folks grabbed me and took off with them. I was worried two.

Three days! We looked all over Jerusalem for three days, all the time them asking me if I was sure that I hadn't seen him

sneak off somewhere. My dad took me and went back over every step Jesus and I took while we were at Passover. Well, I didn't exactly tell him every place we went, but most of 'em.

Then just at nightfall on the third day I heard Jesus' mom shouting down the street. She hollered, "Joseph! Joseph, he's here!" and the whole bunch of us when running down the road. She'd found him in the temple. He'd been there the whole time! In the temple with all the old, important people!

Dad and me got there just as she was walking out with Jesus and Joseph came running up and hugged him then put him down real quick and said, "Jesus! Where have you been?"

And his mom said, "Didn't you know how worried we've been?"

And Jesus looked at them with those big eyes of his ... and you're not gonna believe this ... but he looked up at 'em and said, "Why were you so worried? I've got to do my Dad's business."

(a long pause, then) They just looked at him. And he just looked at them. And then my dad just looked and me and I said, "I don't know what he's talkin' about." And I looked at Mary and Joseph and you could tell that they didn't have a clue either.

And here's where it gets really weird. I know they didn't have any idea what Jesus was talking about, but they said, "Okay, let's go home." That's it. Just "Okay, let's go home."

You know, sometimes when I get in really big trouble, my folks don't punish me right there. They wait 'til we get home.

Jesus is home now, and man, I'll bet he's gettin' it good. *(begins to leave, then stops)* And if he gets outta this, I hope he tells me how he did it. *(he exits)*

THE NEIGHBOR: *(a lady enters)* It's not like a death in the family or something. I mean, they're still alive, and I hope they're okay, but when you lose a neighbor ... a really good one... I don't know. There's a hole. Don't you think?

It's been almost a week now and every morning I look out my kitchen window and expect to see him going to work and sometimes she'd wave at me from her window.

There've been about a dozen families come to look at the house this week. I keep wanting to stick my head out the door and shout, "Don't buy it! They might come back!" But I doubt that. The good ones never do.

I guess it's not like this was really their home. I remember the day they came to town ... and the donkey. You gotta admit, it was a little odd. Most Egyptians rely on camels in this weather, but here they came on that little donkey ... Joseph looking like he'd walked every step of those 300 miles and Mary riding the donkey holding the baby. It was cute sight.

I didn't see them first, but my neighbor came running over asking if I could speak any Hebrew. My dad used to travel a lot for Pharaoh and I'd picked up a few words here and there. Found out the only words I needed were "Hungry" and "sleep." That got us by for the first few days until the house next door was ready.

But their little one ... Jesus ... he picked up Egyptian right along with his parents' Hebrew. Mary said it was embarrassing to ask a two year old the Egyptian word for "oil" when she'd shop. *(looks again at the abandoned house next door, hugs herself for a small moment, then)* Oh, I wish they were still here.

Right there's where he'd play in the mornings while Mary was doing washing. It's a good neighborhood and you could do that. She'd leave Jesus with my kids and they'd take care of him like he was their own.

Last night ... last night I heard Misha crying and went in to her. She said she missed her little friend. He was ... what? Just a year old when they arrived and just turned two when they left. My husband told me ... he said, "Don't get too attached. They're just here for a short stay until things in Nazareth settled down. I don't know the whole story ... but we get news. Mass murder of innocent babies ... all of them. I can't ... I can't imagine ... Herod.

One night I asked Mary how they knew to leave. I'm not sure she trusted me. The Hebrew God thing. They were scared every day they lived in Egypt. Their accents gave them away and even though we have many foreigners in the country these days, it

must have been frightening ... especially with the baby. But she told me that ... well, that Joseph had a dream where an angel told them to leave. That night. Quick.

So at three in the morning they picked up everything they could carry and followed the caravan routes to Egypt. 300 miles. I just can't imagine. Fear makes us do things we can't imagine. And the cost ... Mary said that Jesus had been given some wonderful gifts by visitors shortly after he was born and I think they may have sold them to make the trip.

But ... don't get too attached to the neighbors, he said. How can you not get attached to such sweet people? How can you not fall in love with such a wonderful little family? In fact ... *(she looks around to make sure she's alone)* In fact, one night Joseph was sick and Mary needed someone to watch the baby while she tended to her husband. My kids were gone that night and I was really tired, so I asked my husband if he'd take care of Jesus for a few hours. *(smiles)* I wish you could have seen what happened. Oh, he's good with kids ... he's just sort of ... well ... stupid, sometimes. He thinks they're just short adults. I was in the other room working on something and I could hear him talking to Jesus about when the Nile might be flooding this year and the price of grain along the Delta. Remember ... the kid is just two years old.

Then it got really quiet. My husband stopped talking. I peeked in to see if everything was alright and then I saw him ... He was sitting there on the floor with Jesus on his knee. They were just staring at each other.

I finally said, "Everything okay?"

They never moved. Then he said, "Look at him. Look at his eyes, Reba. Look at the way ... look at the way he's looking at me. It's like ... it's like he can see something."

(a long pause, then) They left as quickly as they came. One morning they came to our door, thanked us for our love and friendship and they were off. Back to Israel. *(looking out her window)* I miss them. I miss them very much. *(she exits)*



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