

Forever Changed

*An Easter Program by Jennifer Davis Sensenig
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This Easter program includes a time of bread sharing, a ritual not intended to be a Lord's Supper with cup, but an extension of the drama and an opportunity for all worshippers to share the good news of resurrection.

Advance Preparation

You will need a worship/song leader and three dramatists, with props including a bowl of bread dough. The recipe for Bannock (Native fry bread) from *Extending the Table* (Herald Press, 1991) is easy to make while acting; if toasting it over a fire is impossible, set up an electric griddle hidden from view. Singing may be accompanied by light rhythm (tambourines, shakers).

Program

In gathering, sing "This is the day" and "I will sing, I will sing a song unto the Lord." After welcoming the group, the worship leader reads Acts 10:34-43. She notes that there is much we don't know about the weeks and months following Jesus' resurrection, but that in this drama we'll imagine how the events of those days might have affected persons involved. The idea is not to rewrite history but to consider together the impact Jesus has on different people in different circumstances.

(Mary, Jesus' mother, sits beside a fire, kneading dough. A neighbor, Sarah, enters carrying a laundry or sewing basket.)

Sarah: Shalom, Mary. You're such an early riser! Are you baking for a crowd?

Mary: *(Laughs)* I thought I'd use the last of the flour and now my bowl is overflowing!

Sarah: *(Shakes her head)* You look well, if a little weary. I spoke with Esther just now. We always exchange greetings, but she has been so distraught over her son these last years. We usually keep it simple: polite, but superficial.

Mary: What was your conversation today?

Sarah: Perhaps it wasn't so unusual. She noticed the blue of the sky. She told me about the meal she was preparing. And she smiled. She is a new woman since her boy returned.

Mary: Barabbas is home?!

Sarah: Well, yes. I thought you had heard.

Mary: Is Esther safe? He is a violent man, isn't he?

Sarah: I haven't spoken with Barabbas, but I believe he's changed. Esther seems so content. In fact, it was her singing that woke me this morning.

Mary: How good it is for Esther to have someone beside her in her old age. *(Pause)* You know, some of the women say they saw him, Sarah.

Sarah: Barabbas?

Mary: No, *my* son, Jesus.

Sarah: I've heard that too, Mary. Do you believe it?

Mary: How can I believe it? He died. Our people, Rome, the mobs in Jerusalem, they all killed him. And now I have no one but God alone.

Sarah: You can stay here, Mary. Bethany is your home now. God will remember your suffering and we will not let you die alone.

Mary: Thank you, Sarah. You are a faithful friend. Years ago, I was angry with my son, too, like your neighbor Esther. I worried about his ministry.

Sarah: No one expects to have a son as gifted as Jesus. No one expects to have a child whose compassion exceeds even that of a mother.

Mary: I should have expected it. He was part of God's promise, you know. Sarah, I'm planning to return to Jerusalem.

Sarah: But why? There's nothing in Jerusalem. Unless you do believe what people are saying.

Mary: How can I not believe? Some of us think he was the Messiah. What if Mary Magdalene's report is true? The stone was rolled away from the door. The tomb is indeed empty.

Sarah: Perhaps the body was stolen.

Mary: Mary says she saw him. She was so close to him. I thought at first she simply *wanted* it to be true, but there are other reports. The men argued about it. But then we began to pray. It was the only way to keep our grief and fear from splintering us.

Sarah: Would you leave Bethany to follow the path of your son? They won't stop with killing only him.

Mary: His brother James is still in Jerusalem. But I don't know about the other boys. My girls are married and Joseph is gone, so I am either abandoned or free. Today I feel free. Whatever is true about Jesus' death or the reports, my place is with the others who trusted he was the One promised by God. I wish you could come with me to Jerusalem.

Sarah: My family is still young. I can't leave, but you are always welcome here, Mary.

Mary: Who would have thought that at my age I would live so boldly. *(Pause, as Mary shapes dough into flat bread loaves to fry or bake. Esther joins the others at the fire.)*

Esther: Shalom. Mary, Sarah, I tell you I have never seen a morning like this one!

Sarah: Esther, it is a blessing to see you so glad. Your face shines.

Esther: Perhaps I'm finally living up to my namesake's reputation for beauty. I bless God for this day and my son's return.

Mary: It was a surprise to hear that he'd come home.

Sarah: For years he caused you nothing but grief.

Esther: But Sarah, he's changed. He told me what your son did for him, Mary.

Mary: What do you mean?

Esther: *(Quietly to Sarah)* Surely our Mary knows the events in Jerusalem?

Mary: *(Overhearing)* Of course I know the events. I know that my son was killed. I am still wondering what it all means. I'm thinking of going back to Jerusalem to join the ones who followed Jesus.

Esther: Mary, your son gave me back my son. Sarah was right to say Barabbas caused me grief. He could not bear the injustice of being a Jew in this Roman world. He was angry and wanted a revolution. He would have used any means necessary to achieve our freedom.

Mary: But how has my son's death changed any of that?

Esther: Barabbas was sentenced to die for crimes against the state. Since it was the Passover, Pilate offered to release a Jewish prisoner. The other prisoners assumed Jesus would be freed. After all, he has never been violent. He was a man of compassion and peace, a healer.

Mary: He knew that even our prophets who demanded justice did not allow for killing.

Esther: When the crowd cheered for Barabbas to be released, he could not believe his ears. And then he turned to Jesus. Here, a man wrongfully sentenced to die, looked on him with compassion. It changed him. Barabbas came home.

Sarah: What will he do in Bethany? I'm afraid his reputation precedes him.

Esther: No one needs to fear him now. He has set aside his weapons. (*Laughing*) He says he wants to care for his mother!

Sarah: Imagine that!

Esther: The courage Jesus had to face death, gives Barabbas courage to live a new life.

Mary: What good news! Esther, I think I'm making this bread for your son's homecoming party. I wish I could be here for the festivities.

Esther: Where are you going?

Mary: I'm returning to Jerusalem. I know that Jesus died. I don't expect he will take care of me in the same way your son will be with you, but I see how his death has changed everything for you. It is the power of God that changed Barabbas. I only hope that others who need him will look to the Messiah and see the compassion and love and peace and courage he had. (*Handing Esther the baked bread*) This is for you.

In response the worship leader leads the group in praying in unison:

Lord God,
on the cross we see the depth of your compassion for this world.
At the empty tomb we experience your resurrection power.
In the church we practice your way of peace.
God, in this season of resurrection, give us courage
to live new lives through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Change us through your power.
Sustain us with the Bread of Life today
so that we may feast with you in glory. Amen.

Sing together HWB 272 "Christ is risen! Shout hosanna," during which the three dramatists may share bread among the group (if this song is new to your group, have a soloist or trio sing the first verse). In sending, sing HWB 422 "Bwana awabariki," using "The Lord is risen" in the leader part.