

CHILDREN'S STORY HOUR

Lessons learned on Calvary

By Janaan Manternach
NC News Service

He was proud to wear the uniform of an army officer. He had worked his way up through the ranks. Now he was a centurion in the Roman army — a non-commissioned officer commanding a hundred soldiers. And he was commander of the execution squad.

He went to the army headquarters at the governor's mansion. The trial of Jesus was just ending. The defendant was being sentenced. "Crucify him," the governor, Pontius Pilate, ordered.

"He doesn't look like a violent man," the centurion thought as he ordered his soldiers to carry out the sentence. They roughly led Jesus away to a hall inside.

They beat Jesus with whips. Then they put a crown of thorns on his head and a purple cloak over his shoulders. They spit in his face and bowed before him in mockery.

"What a remarkable man," the centurion thought as he watched. "I couldn't take that kind of treatment. I wish I could stop this kind of torture. But the governor ordered that the prisoner be scourged. I can't believe that Jesus doesn't try to hit or kick his torturers."

The centurion felt sorry for Jesus and at the same time was amazed by him. On the way through the streets he ordered a strong farmer named Simon to help Jesus carry the heavy cross.

He was amazed at how kind Jesus was to everyone along the way. At the place of execution he offered Jesus some drugged wine to ease the pain, but Jesus would not drink it.

The centurion cringed as his

soldiers drove the nails through Jesus' hands and feet and they raised the cross. He watched Jesus' body wrench in pain as the cross dropped down into the hole that held it.

Just then the leaders and people in the crowd started jeering at Jesus. "Save yourself!" they mocked. "Come down from the cross!" "He saved others but he can't save himself!"

"He's not at all like the criminals we've executed in the past," the centurion thought. "What has he done to make people so angry with him?"

A strange darkness fell over the whole area even though it was afternoon. People gradually drifted back home.

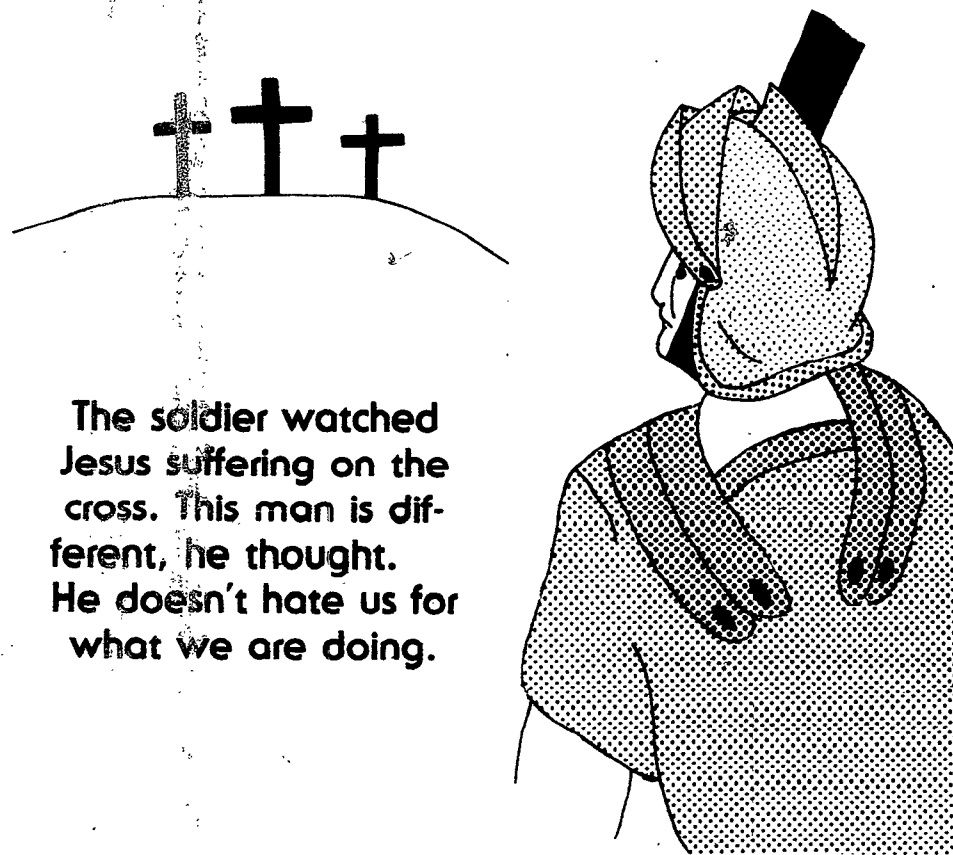
The centurion stayed to wait for the death of the condemned man. He thought deeply during those three slow hours. "I wonder what Jesus is really like. I've never seen anyone cope with pain and hate the way he has. He hasn't said a harsh word against any of those who are hurting him."

Around 3 o'clock Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Someone soaked a sponge in sour wine, placed it on a spear and tried to make Jesus drink it. A few minutes later, Jesus died.

"Clearly this man is innocent," the centurion thought, contradicting the judgment of his superior, the governor. "He was the Son of God."

*Story Hour biblical quotes —
this week from — Mark 15:33-39
— are paraphrased.*

*(Ms. Manternach is the author
of numerous catechetical books
and articles for children.)*



The soldier watched Jesus suffering on the cross. This man is different, he thought. He doesn't hate us for what we are doing.



Teaching

Emphasizing the power of forgiveness, Chicago's Joseph Cardinal Bernardin will preach a four-day Holy Week mission on WGN-TV, April 15, 16, 17 and 18 at 8:00 p.m. CST. This important teaching series will be received throughout the nation and in most home mission areas via WGN-TV's super station network of broadcast and cable TV facilities.

Funded in part by a grant from the Catholic Church Extension Society, the series will develop this theme: We are the forgiven. As forgiven, how do we act? As forgiven, how do we pray? As forgiven, how do we dream?

Bringing the word of salvation to

people in home mission areas is the work of an Extension Society team. But the team is small and needs help. It needs you.

Join us and become a member of the Extension Society team. Although you won't be present personally in the home missions, your impact will be felt in this holy effort. Together we can bring the word of Christ to those who might never hear it.

Write for a free subscription to Extension magazine today and discover the difference you can make. Together we can achieve God's goal here in our own beloved country.



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HOW ABOUT YOU?

- Have you ever known someone who was laughed at and ridiculed? How did they respond? How did it make you feel?
- Did you ever start out not liking someone and then change your mind once you got to know them? What happened to make you change?

Children's Reading Corner

"Pelican" is a story by Brian Wildsmith. Children and adults might read it together. Afterward they might remember people who are wonderfully different from what they seem. Consider the fact that there is always more in people than meets the eye and that what is hidden is often mysterious and special.

Pelican is different. No one can figure out what sort of bird he is. Gradually the kind of bird he is becomes apparent by what he does. In the end Pelican flies away leaving a boy named Paul and his father still wondering about him. (Pantheon Books, 201 E. 50th St., New York, N.Y. 10022, 1982, Hardback, \$8.95)