

AMAZING *Grace*



A READY TO SING
EASTER

Arranged & Orchestrated by
RUSSELL MAULDIN

Created by
Sue C. Smith

DRAMA RESOURCE **Crossroads of Grace**

Written by Sue C. Smith

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CROSSROADS OF GRACE

By Sue C. Smith

CAST

JOE – a man in his forties, strong in his faith and strong physically, meets other people easily, married to Ruth

RUTH – a woman in her forties, shares her faith openly and comfortably, genuine concern for others, somewhat weak physically

MATTHEW – a man in his thirties, in good physical shape, evades questions about himself, a little cynical and hardened spiritually, but basically a nice guy

SARAH – a young woman in her twenties, a single mother, not confident in herself, looking for reassurance and hope

JOHN – in his late teens, frantic, nervous, angry, unpredictable, emotionally out of control

SETTING

Backdrop is of a rocky roadway stretching off into the distance... not identifiable as any country or time period. At center stage are several large stones which can be used for seating or standing on to look off into the distance. Small shrubs can also be part of the scenery, but nothing that identifies the actual location or time period in which this story takes place.

PROPS AND COSTUMES

All these should also be generally unidentifiable as far as time period. Sleeping bags and backpacks should have rope or fabric bindings and ties, muted or dark colors. Avoid having metal buckles or fasteners visible. Cooking implements should appear like they are clay or pottery or can possibly be a basic metal camping set. Canteens can be fabric covered and should look old and well-used. Clothing worn can be old sweats or worn jeans or khakis. Avoid having any logos visible. The two women can wear the same or may choose skirts that hit below the knee. Ruth can wear a shawl, and Sarah should have the kind of sling that is tied over the shoulder to carry a baby.

The basic approach to the setting, props and costumes should be to lead the audience to believe, or at least not prevent them from believing, that this is current day America. But it should basically be compatible with life in ancient Palestine as well.

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Song: Grace Medley (Amazing Grace / Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing / Grace Greater Than Our Sin)

[Enter JOE, RUTH and MATTHEW from stage right during the end of the song (“Through many dangers...”, meas. 99). JOE and MATTHEW are wearing backpacks, and all are wearing simple, nondescript clothing. JOE has his arm around RUTH, helping her walk. She seems very weak. MATTHEW has her elbow in his hand, and he is also carrying her backpack. They help her sit down on a large, smooth rock. JOE kneels down attentively by her with his arm around her, while MATTHEW watches from a few feet away. Their belongings are few and simple... backpacks, sleeping bags, canteens and a few supplies. One can tell they’ve been walking for a long time. They are weary, and yet thankful to be where they are and have what they have.]

- JOE: I think this will be a good place to rest, Ruth. We can stay for as long as we need to. But... if you don't start feeling better in a few days, maybe we should consider stopping altogether.
- RUTH: *(coughing)* Joe, I know I'll be all right. I believe God is going to give me the strength to keep going. And it might be that He wants us to stay here for a while for a reason.
- JOE: **[He takes a clean cloth from his pocket and pours water from a canteen onto it. He puts it on the back of RUTH's neck, trying to cool her.]** I won't argue with that, dear, if you'll promise not to argue with me about resting as much as you can.
- RUTH: I promise. But look where we are, Joe. Each way the roads go from here, they lead to another city full of people who need to know about Jesus and what He did for us... what He will do for them. That's why we're doing this, right? **[She glances up and remembers that MATTHEW is standing there.]** Thank you for your help, sir.
- JOE: **[rising to shake MATTHEW's hand]** Oh, I'm sorry... I forgot you were standing there. Thank you. My name is Joe, and this is my wife Ruth.
- MATTHEW: **[shaking JOE's hand]** Hi, I'm Matthew. I'm glad I happened by when I did. *(to RUTH)* You looked like you couldn't walk any farther.
- JOE: Ruth has been feeling bad for a few days now. I think it's just a simple cough, but the walking each day is very demanding.
- MATTHEW: Walking each day? Where are you going exactly?
- RUTH: We're walking all the way across the country.
- MATTHEW: *(puzzled)* All the way across the country? Why?
- RUTH: It's *(searching for the right word)*... an assignment we've been given.
- MATTHEW: An assignment? Who would assign you to do something like that?
- JOE: **[He and RUTH look at each other and smile.]** God would. We believe our God is sending us. We began on the west coast, and we're walking all the way to the sea on the east.
- RUTH: As we walk, we share our story with anyone we meet... our story about Jesus of Nazareth and how He has changed our lives... well, saved our lives actually.
- MATTHEW: **[looking at them suspiciously and with some amusement]** Jesus of Nazareth saved your lives?
- RUTH: Oh yes... yes He did. **[She begins coughing and can't continue talking. JOE kneels down next to her again.]**
- JOE: **[offering her the canteen]** Here, Ruth. Take another sip of water.
- MATTHEW: Well, I'm sure it's an interesting story, but it doesn't seem like you're going to be physically able to do this. I've had a little experience treating people with illnesses, and that cough you've got sounds pretty serious.
- RUTH: You're a doctor then?
- MATTHEW: *(evasively)* Oh no... no, not a doctor. *(changing the subject)* Look, I think there may be a little market just ahead. Let me go see if I can find something there to make you feel better.
- JOE: That would be so kind of you. **[reaching for his backpack]** Here, let me give you some money.

MATTHEW: (*brushing off this offer*) Don't worry about it. Let me see what I can find first.

JOE: Thank you, Matthew.

[MATTHEW exits stage left]

JOE: (*looking up and down the roads*) I'm feeling this is a crossroad in more ways than one, Ruth. It's a place of decision for us. You know, when we felt God leading us to walk across the whole country sharing His love, I don't think either of us realized how hard it might be.

RUTH: He's been faithful though, hasn't He?

JOE: Yes. In ways I couldn't have imagined before. I'm depending on Him now to heal you. But if you don't get better, Ruth, maybe it's a sign that He wants us to stop and go back home.

RUTH: Well, God knows we're listening. He'll make His will clear. Meanwhile, the hardships we're going through just make me think more about Jesus and all the roads He traveled... especially that last road to Jerusalem. If He could walk that road for us, I want to walk this one for Him, no matter how hard it seems.

JOE: I know. And you know I feel that too.

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[Music begins - "Here Comes The King"]

And on days like this sometimes it does make the walking easier if I imagine I'm walking behind Him right into Jerusalem.

RUTH: Hearing the crowds shout "Hosanna..." watching the people wave their palm branches as Jesus rides by...

Song: Here Comes the King

[As the song ends, MATTHEW returns from stage left.]

MATTHEW: Well, I didn't find any medicine. But there IS clean water, and there was a produce market, so I was able to get some herbs. Maybe I could use them to make you something to drink that would help you feel better.

RUTH: Thank you, Matthew. That's so kind.

JOE: You'll find everything you need in my pack there, Matthew. Let me go gather some wood and kindling for a fire. Do you mind staying here with Ruth for a few minutes?

MATTHEW: I'd be glad to do that.

[JOE exits stage right]

MATTHEW: (*to RUTH*) Would you like some more cool water for now?

RUTH: No. I think I'm all right. Why don't you tell me more about yourself while we wait. What brings you to this crossroad? Where are you headed?

MATTHEW: (*wanting to avoid this conversation*) Not much to tell. Just going from one town to another.

RUTH: Are you on your way back home then? Or is that where you've come from?

MATTHEW: Home? No. Haven't been home for ages. I guess you could say I'm just drifting. You know... trying to find myself. Trying to figure out who I am and what in the world I should do with my life.

RUTH: I see. Joe and I were like that not too long ago. But then, Jesus changed everything.

MATTHEW: So you said before.

RUTH: Well, you know, that's what He always seems to do. You stumble along messed up and confused about life. Then you meet Jesus, and He just seems to make the pieces fall into place. He somehow knows exactly what you need. Joe thought he needed revenge on all the people who had hurt him. And I thought I needed a lot of things to help me not be afraid anymore. Turns out, what we really needed was the life only Jesus could give us.

MATTHEW: I don't know much about that kind of thing. He sounds like every other religious leader, you know?

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[Music starts - "On His Knees"]

RUTH: I understand why you'd think that if you don't know Him. ... There was a night... it was close to the end of His life on earth. He knew that the next day He would die by crucifixion. He knew He had already been betrayed by someone in His inner circle. So what did He do? He welcomed His disciples to a dinner. He washed their feet. He prepared them as best He could for what they'd have to face. He prayed for them. If that doesn't make Him more than just another religious leader, I don't know what would.

Song: On His Knees

[As the song ends, a young woman enters from stage left. She is carrying a baby in a sling tied in front of her, and she has a small knapsack of her belongings. She glances around as though she is unsure and frightened.]

RUTH: Hello there. My name is Ruth. Please... you're welcome to come and rest here for as long as you need to. My goodness, is that a little one you're carrying there?

SARAH: **[patting the baby to comfort him]** Yes. This is my son Andrew, and I'm Sarah. There's a town not far over that next hill, isn't there?

MATTHEW: Yes, you're almost there. Are you all alone on this road?

SARAH: *(bristling a little with suspicion)* I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself and my son without anyone's help.

RUTH: Matthew wasn't suggesting otherwise, I'm sure. Why don't you sit down and rest with us for a few minutes, Sarah. My husband has gone to gather some wood for a fire, and then Matthew has some herbs he's going to use to make something for us to drink. Doesn't that sound good?

SARAH: *(reluctantly)* All right. **[She goes to sit next to Ruth, who looks at and admires the baby.]** I guess I am pretty tired of walking, and this little guy here seems heavier than when I started out.

[JOE returns with some branches.]

JOE: Here we go. This should get us started. **[He drops the branches at left center stage and he and MATTHEW begin breaking the branches and arranging them for a campfire. He notices SARAH.]** Well, hello. I see we have a new friend.

[During this conversation, JOE busies himself with quietly making the campfire. MATTHEW gets out small cups, a flask of water, and small grate to put over the fire and heat the water... Generally their backs should be to the audience and their actions should not distract from the conversation between RUTH and SARAH.]

RUTH: Sarah, this is my husband Joe. Joe, this is Sarah and her little boy, Andrew. They're just going to rest for awhile before going on to the next town.

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- JOE: Is that home for you?
- SARAH: Yes, that's where we're headed, and that's where we're staying if everything works out.
- RUTH: Works out?
- SARAH: If my father will let us stay...
- RUTH: Oh my dear, why wouldn't he?
- SARAH: Well, when I left I think his last words to me were, *(imitating his harshness and anger)* "You're going to be sorry you're doing this, mark my words."
(to RUTH) It's not your problem, and I really don't want to talk about it. Tell me what brings you here?
- JOE: Ruth and I are traveling... walking from town to town and telling anyone who will listen about Jesus and what he has done for us. We were having a bit of a struggle today... Ruth hasn't been feeling well, you see... and Matthew here was kind enough to help us along.
- RUTH: We're walking from town to town telling people about our friend, Jesus. Do you know Jesus, Sarah?
- SARAH: *(somewhat startled by this question)* I... well, of course I've heard stories about him. They say he was kind and forgiving to everyone... even people who least deserved it.
- RUTH: That's the truth. Joe and I know that first hand. He's the best friend you could ever have.
- SARAH: I could use somebody like that in my corner these days. I told you I'm headed home. I didn't tell you that my family doesn't know I'm coming, and they sure aren't expecting me to show up with a baby.
- RUTH: So you've been gone for awhile then.
- SARAH: I thought I was in love, you see, and nothing could keep me from following the man I loved wherever he went. Everything happened just like my father said it would when I left. I got pregnant... and then I got dumped. I know when I get home, I'm going to have to face my dad who's gonna be saying, "I told you so." It might be he won't even let me stay. But I've got to take that chance. I can't take care of Andrew on my own. I need help. I'm just praying they'll take me back.
- RUTH: You know Sarah, Jesus told a story once that sounds a lot like yours. It was a story about boy who left his father's house and made a lot of mistakes before he realized he couldn't make it on his own. But when he went back home, his father ran to meet him, he kissed him and welcomed him back. Then he threw a big party in his honor.
- SARAH: I don't expect anything like that. I know I don't deserve it.
- RUTH: All of us have made mistakes we don't deserve to be forgiven for. I don't know your father. I can't promise he'll forgive the way the father did in the story Jesus told. But I can promise you that if you'll just ask, Jesus will forgive anything and everything you've ever done wrong.
- SARAH: Why would He do something like that?
- RUTH: Because of His grace, Sarah. It means we're given mercy we don't deserve and could never earn. All we have to do is ask.
- SARAH: I would love to believe that's possible. But can I really be forgiven, Ruth?

RUTH: You can... yes. We could pray together right now. You could ask Jesus to forgive you right here. And while we're praying, we could ask God to prepare your father's heart to receive you and little Andrew back home. Would you want to do that?

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[Music starts - "No Other Word For Grace but Amazing"]

SARAH: (*hesitant at first*) You mean it's just that simple? You just ask and you're forgiven?

RUTH: It's just that simple. You simply ask.

SARAH: Well then... yes, I want to do that. I want to be forgiven.

Song: No Other Word For Grace but Amazing

[They pray together during the song.]

MATTHEW: I believe this concoction is ready. **[He pours it into small cups and JOE takes them to RUTH and SARAH.]**

RUTH: This tastes good, Matthew. It's very soothing, and I know it's going to make my cough better. Thank you.

SARAH: Yes... thank you, Matthew. It's very good.

[JOHN rushes in. He enters through the audience and comes onto the stage from center downstage. He's in his late teens. He's carrying a knife, and he confronts the four travelers. He's nervous, panicky, and wild acting, as though he's never done anything like this before.]

JOHN: You... get down on the ground! **[He motions to MATTHEW, who raises his hands and complies slowly, and then does the same to JOE.]** You too... down on the ground! Get down or you'll get hurt.

MATTHEW: Take it easy, man. Nobody's going to fight you.

[SARAH turns to protect Andrew.]

SARAH: Please... don't hurt us.

JOHN: Just stay back!

JOE: (*calmly*) What do you want from us?

JOHN: Money... whatever you've got... Put it all in there. Come on... all of it... put it in the bag. **(He tosses a bag in JOE's direction and JOE picks it up.)**

JOE: I'm afraid we don't have much. Here... **[He shows JOHN a small pouch and then puts it into the bag.]** This is all the money we have.

JOHN: **[He turns to SARAH.]** What about you? **[He starts toward her.]** Pretty girl like you. **[He gestures toward the sling she is hugging close to her chest.]** What are you hiding there? You got money in there?

[As he walks toward her, MATTHEW leaps from behind and wrestles JOHN to the ground. They struggle briefly and MATTHEW knocks the knife away. JOE helps subdue JOHN, who fights helplessly against both of them.]

JOHN: Let go of me! Let go!

MATTHEW: Quit fighting, man. You're no match for the two of us.

JOE: Settle down now, boy. It's all right. No one's going to hurt you.

JOHN: Let me go! Let go of me! **[He begins to cry almost hysterically.]** Get away from me... get away!

- JOE: In the name of Jesus, I'm telling you to calm down now. Calm down. It's all right. You're going to be all right.
- JOHN: **[His crying gradually begins to subside and he begins to calm down.]** I'm sorry! I'm sorry... I've never... I wasn't going to hurt anybody. I've just got to get some money. I've got to... got to have a drink. It's getting late. Going to get dark soon. I've got to get to town and get a drink before it gets dark.
- MATTHEW: Man... what in the world are you talking about? **[He retrieves the knife and stands between JOHN and SARAH.]**
- RUTH: I think this boy is scared more than he's dangerous, Joe.
- JOE: Is that true, son? What are you scared of?
- JOHN: **[He puts his face into his hands and cries.]** Please... I've got to get something to drink before it gets dark. You don't understand. I can't take the dark without that.
- JOE: **[He puts his arm around JOHN's shoulder.]** It's all right. You're safe with us. No one's going to hurt you. Tell me what's going on. How can we help you?
- JOHN: **[looks up at JOE, wiping tears off his face]** You wouldn't understand.
- JOE: I'll try if you'll tell me.
- JOHN: **[There's a long pause while he looks at JOE, trying to decide what to do.]** You gotta believe me, I'm not a thief. I've never robbed anybody before.... I'm 18 years old, and I'm gonna die. I'm gonna die... probably before I reach 19. *(He begins to cry again.)* I just have to get some money so I can get something to drink before it gets dark again. When it's dark, it's like I can feel myself dying all night long.
- JOE: *(speaking very calmly and quietly)* What's your name, son?
- JOHN: It's John.
- JOE: John, my name is Joe. I believe you didn't mean to hurt us. In fact, I believe, strange as it may sound, that God sent you to us today. Because you see, we have hope for you.
- JOHN: **[He looks up surprised.]** Hope? For me?
- JOE: You say you're afraid because you know you're going to die. All of us feel that fear, John. All of us are going to die, we just don't know exactly when.

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[Music begins - "He Is Alive"]

- JOE: Do you know Jesus, John? He's my friend, and I'd like to tell you about him if you'll let me. You see, Jesus died. But then, after He died, He rose from the grave and lived again. Because of that, we don't have to be afraid anymore. You don't have to be afraid, John. Let me tell you why not.

Song: He Is Alive with Rejoice, the Lord Is King

[During the song, JOE and JOHN continue to talk. RUTH moves over to them and prays. The "pantomime" should make clear that JOE is inviting JOHN to pray to receive Christ. JOHN and JOE pray together. At the end of the song, their prayer ends.]

- JOE: How are feeling, John? Are you better now?
- JOHN: Yes... yes, I'm better. Thank you, Joe.
- RUTH: Jesus doesn't want you to be afraid, John. He'll carry all your fear for you, if you'll let Him.
- JOHN: I don't feel so afraid now. I don't want to be again. I just need someone to show me how.

JOE: Look, John... we've got some friends just a little way back down this road. When you get to the town, go to the inn and tell them Joe and Ruth sent you there. They will give you whatever you need... a place to stay... or food to eat. They'll be happy to tell you more about following Jesus.

JOHN: Thank you, Joe. I'll find them. Will you be coming there too?

JOE: Ruth and I will be going on the other direction. We'll be praying for you though. Maybe we'll see you again. But if we don't see you on this earth, we will definitely see you in Heaven one day.

[JOE, RUTH and JOHN embrace and JOHN exits, stage right.]

SARAH: Ruth, I'm moving on as well. Home is just over that hill. Thank you for your kindness, and especially for praying for me and Andrew. I don't know what we'll find when we get home, but I'm just going to trust that God has a plan to take care of us.

RUTH: I believe He does and He will. You and Andrew will be in our prayers every day.

[They embrace and SARAH exits stage left.]

MATTHEW: **[staring after JOHN shaking his head]** You and Ruth sure have some weird ideas about people.

JOE: I can understand it's strange to you that I let John leave, Matthew. But I really believe deep in my heart that John wouldn't have hurt us.

MATTHEW: *(with a little cynicism)* Because you think God sent him to you?

JOE: *(laughing a little)* Well, yes. I do believe that. Just like I believe God brought Sarah and Andrew this way, and like I believe He brought you along just when Ruth and I needed someone. But, why do I have this feeling that you still don't believe God would take an interest in what happens to any of us?

MATTHEW: Maybe God would take an interest in you and Ruth. You seem like really nice people... kind... compassionate... ok, you're a little crazy, I think, walking across the country with nothing to gain. And I can see why God would watch out for Sarah and her baby.

JOE: But God doesn't care for you, is that what you're saying?

MATTHEW: You don't know the real me, Joe. Trust me. You wouldn't like me much if you did. I'm pretty sure, God wants nothing to do with a loser like me.

RUTH: I don't know what you've done that you think is so awful that God couldn't forgive it.

MATTHEW: Really? How about if I killed somebody? Let's say I killed somebody like Sarah and her baby. You think you'd still like me so much then? You think God would?

JOE: Is that what happened Matthew? **[He stares at MATTHEW, who doesn't answer.]**

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[Music starts - "Amazing Grace Underscore"]

JOE: What if I told you I was responsible for someone's death? Ruth told you earlier that God had saved our lives. That was the truth. Sit down here, and let me tell you the whole story.

It's about a little boy who was always at the wrong place at the wrong time. He grew up in a poor environment, and he quickly became a product of that environment. While other kids learned to read, he learned how to cheat. While they learned to trade, he learned to steal. Just a common criminal lifestyle, always at the wrong place at the wrong time.

And this lifestyle followed him through childhood, adolescence and on into adulthood. Eventually it caught up with him. He was caught in the act again.

Wrong place, wrong time, again.

But this time his crime would carry the death penalty.

It should have been an ordinary execution, really. Outside the walls of the city. But it wasn't. Because that day another man being executed or crucified on the middle cross was no ordinary man. And this man named Jesus looked at this young, wrong place, wrong time thief next to him and he said, "Today son, you can go with me to Paradise."

And for the first time in that boy's life, when it mattered most, he was in the right place at the right time. You see, because of grace, it doesn't matter to Him how many wrong places you've been or how many times, He welcomes whosoever will. And what happens to a life that encounters His grace is nothing short of amazing.

Song: Amazing Grace

MATTHEW: You're right about one thing, Joe. That kind of love and grace is amazing. And the story is too. But what does it all have to do with you, Joe?

JOE: Matthew, that thief... the one who died next to Jesus that day... was my brother. We grew up the same way, and I helped plan the crime he was executed for. I was supposed to be with him that day. But I wasn't. I was there the day he was crucified. I was at least partly responsible for what had happened. I stood there at the cross, and I didn't know how I was going to bear the guilt of what I'd done. Then I heard what Jesus said to him. Matthew, my brother died knowing he had been forgiven. Maybe I could live knowing the same thing. Finding the grace Jesus gave me changed my whole life. It can change yours too. Won't you let me show you how?

MATTHEW: (*hesitating and then finally surrendering*) Well, if you and Ruth are going to insist on going on with this crazy mission of yours, I guess you'd better have somebody along to watch out for you. And if I'm going to go along, I guess I could listen to more while we walk.

[JOE smiles broadly and slaps MATTHEW on the back.]

JOE: You'll come with us then?

RUTH: That's wonderful, Matthew. It'll be great to have you along.

JOE: (*To RUTH*) You sure you're up to going on?

RUTH: (*nodding*) We'll take it one day at a time, and see what God wants, all right?

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[They gather their things as the introduction for "Crown Him Medley" begins.]

MATTHEW: Ruth if you start getting tired, you let me know.

RUTH: Just talking about God's grace has given me new energy. I don't think I could ever get too tired to tell someone else about how incredible it is. It makes me want to worship Jesus and say again and again that He alone is worthy of all our honor and praise.

[They exit as song begins.]

Song: Crown Him! Medley (Crown Him with Many Crowns / Grace Greater Than Our Sin / Amazing Grace)