Character Study

» Look at the statements with each character. What can you add to each list?
» Where do we see examples of the kind of behavior we witnessed in the characters in today’s text? Think of biblical, historical, and modern times.
» When have we, or people we know, behaved like this person? Give examples.

1. We are like Pilate when we …
   • abuse our political power.
   • blame others for our decisions.
   • look for outside verification or support for our actions.

2. We are like the chief priests when we …
   • abuse our religious power.
   • incite weaker folks to protest on our selfish behalf.
   • expect folks to be blind followers, not critical thinkers.

3. We are like the crowd when we …
   • get caught up in a cause emotionally and irrationally.
   • are complicit and don’t address wrongdoing.
   • find it easier to join the action than critique it.

4. We are like Jesus when we …
   • are willing to suffer unjustly (humiliated or mocked) because of our faith commitment.
   • have refused to become violent in our actions or speech.
   • felt abandoned by God and our friends.

5. We are like the centurion when we …
   • recognize Jesus for who he is.
   • do not hesitate to proclaim Jesus to the world.
   • are willing to believe based on what we’ve witnessed.
Interacting with God’s Story and Vision

A. Identify with the characters
Distribute the worksheet and pencils. Review Darling’s comments in ABS, pages 12–13. Bring together the character groups again. Using the worksheet, discuss how we are like this person/group. Report on the discussions.

Close with a prayer of confession for our part in wrongdoing. Offer a prayer of hope that Jesus will be our role model for living in a dark and dangerous world.

B. Reflection on Psalm 22
Jesus’ last words were quoted from Psalm 22. Read the psalm slowly, pausing and thinking about the words that stand out for you. Reflect on times when this psalm is especially meaningful.

» When have you felt abandoned by God or in a hopeless situation?

Like Jesus, we can cry out to God and express our honest emotions. Take time to pray or journal or draw your emotions.

Option: Note the parallels found in Psalm 22 and Mark 15.

» Why do you think Mark has Jesus identifying so closely with this psalm?

C. Prayers to lighten the darkness
Darling associates darkness with emotional emptiness and abandonment. The actions of the leaders and crowd, the physical and verbal abuse, the injustice of it all contribute to this darkness. There are many people today who are suffering from abuse and/or feel empty and lost. We are still living in darkness. What hope can Christians offer? Invite verbal prayers for those who suffer any type of injustice. To symbolize hope, either light tea candles with each prayer or hold a Christ candle while you say a prayer and then pass the candle on.

Option: Write the prayers on slips of paper, gather them, and have one person read them. For each prayer repeat: “Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.”

D. Becoming mediators
This session reminds us that Jesus mediated a new covenant, which restored relationships between God and humanity. We see broken relationships all around us due to injustice. Rather than be complicit, let’s find ways to bring justice and healing through mediation. Think about the relationships in your family, church, or work community. Think about the conflicts you see between cultures, political groups, and nations.

» What actions can we take as mediators?

Option: Invite someone who works at restorative justice issues to speak to the group.

E. Removing barriers (see ABS, p. 13, #4).
The torn curtain symbolized open access to God. This is something new God is doing, inviting us to new ways to worship and to be in a deeper, more intimate relationship with God. The rules have changed for believers.

» What barriers do we experience that stand in the way of authentic worship?

» What factors prevent us from becoming more intimate with the risen Christ?

» What barriers must we remove to allow everyone to experience God’s grace?

» What changes would your church have to make in order to provide open accessibility to all God’s people?