

Return to the Stable

An Honors Creative Project (HONRS 499)

by

Erik Steven Gernand

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Wes Gehring

*Dr. Wes D. Gehring*

---

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

April 28, 1995

Date of Graduation: July 1995

SpColl  
Thesis  
LT  
2489  
.74  
1995  
.847

## Abstract

### Purpose of creative project

The children's musical Return to the Stable was written to fill a lacking I discovered while looking for suitable plays for my youth group to perform during the Easter season. When I couldn't find anything I was interested in, I decided to write my own play. I thought that would be a perfect way to use my communications skills and complete my Honors project. After completing the written play I put it to the test. The play was produced under my direction on April 9, 1995 at Trinity United Methodist Church where I served as youth pastor from Fall 1993 until Spring 1995. Producing the play was the best way for me to make revisions as a writer. It was truly a work in progress until the play actually hit the stage that Sunday morning. I also created three original songs on the guitar which were performed within the play. My Honors creative project is the most fulfilling work I have done while a student at Ball State. I truly enjoyed being able to combine my passions - music, youth work and communications. Even though playwriting is not directly in the realm of my major of telecommunications, it is definitely an important part of the communications of our culture.

Return to the Stable

by: Erik Gernand

an Easter play for youth groups of all sizes

ACT I

A barn in a village near Jerusalem.

song: Light is the Soul

ACT II

A temple on the way to Jerusalem.

song: Follow Me

ACT III

The road into Jerusalem.

song: 'Til the End of Time

Originally performed April 9, 1995  
at Trinity United Methodist Church, Portland, IN.

**Cast of Characters**  
(speaking roles)

Esther & Bessie

two grandmotherly, scripture quoting cows who would give the shirts off their backs to help someone

Nadine

a crabby, selfish, conceited old horse with a bad attitude

Donald

the donkey who carried Mary into Bethlehem, a real family man

Oliver

a poor old ox who needs some help

Danny

a real tough guy dove from the bad side of Jerusalem

NARRATOR

SCRIPTURE READER

(non-speaking roles)

Donald Jr. (the donkey), two pesky goats, Jesus, the crowd

Act 1

SCRIPTURE READER

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell them that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." This took place to fulfill what the prophet wrote.

Luke 21:1-4

(THE SCENE IS THE INSIDE OF A BARN. THERE IS SOME HAY LYING AROUND. BACK IN THE CORNER, NADINE THE HORSE IS SLEEPING. UP FRONT, ESTHER AND BESSIE, THE COWS, ARE SLEEPING ALSO.)

NARRATOR

Welcome to Jerusalem, 33 A.D. the year of our Lord. The city has been in quite a stir lately. Jesus is preparing to come to the city. His teachings have made him one of the most popular men around. But also one of the most hated. He tells the people of eternal life and forgiveness of their sins. He offers them the gifts of his Father. Whenever Jesus preaches on a hillside, a large crowd always gathers to hear what he has to say. But there are also a great deal of people who don't agree with Jesus. They don't believe that he is the Son of God. Many of the leaders of the temples and cities want to see Jesus killed because of what he is saying. And if they have their way, he will be killed.

Our story starts in a barn on the outskirts of a village near Jerusalem. Nadine, the horse, is sleeping in the corner. She is very old, and also very grumpy. The two cows are Bessie and Esther. They live in the barn with Nadine. Be careful not to wake them up.

(NADINE STARTS TO SNORE VERY LOUDLY. AFTER A FEW SECONDS, ESTHER STARTS TO ROLL AROUND AND GRUNT LIKE SHE IS HAVING A NIGHTMARE. SHE THEN SITS UP QUICKLY.)

ESTHER

Earthquake!

BESSIE

(Waking up quickly.)

Calm down, Esther honey. It's just Nadine.

ESTHER

(Regaining composure.)

Oh! Thank goodness!

(BESSIE AND ESTHER LOOK OVER AT NADINE AS SHE CONTINUES TO SNORE.)

BESSIE

I haven't had a good night's sleep in years. That snoring is driving me crazy.

ESTHER

Maybe we should say something.

BESSIE

Oh Esther! The shame of it. That wouldn't be very ladylike.

ESTHER

But Bessie, we've taken this like polite little cows long enough. She's going to do us in.

BESSIE

Maybe if we throw something at her she'll stop.

ESTHER

Like what?

BESSIE

Like...(she gets up and looks around, then looks out the window) like that boulder out there.

ESTHER

Oh Bessie, we've put ourselves to shame. Remember what Jesus said...

BESSIE

I know, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." You're right, it's not that bad.

(NADINE SUDDENLY STARTS TO HAVE A VIOLENT SNORING ATTACK. BOTH COWS QUICKLY PICK UP PILLOWS AND THROW THEM AT NADINE. AS SOON AS THEY THROW THEM, THEY DUCK DOWN SO SHE WON'T KNOW IT WAS THEM. NADINE SITS UP QUICKLY AND LOOKS DAZED. SHE MUMBLES SOMETHING THEN QUICKLY DROPS BACK DOWN TO SLEEP. SHE IS NOT SNORING THIS TIME. BESSIE AND ESTHER APPREHENSIVELY SIT BACK UP.)

ESTHER

It worked!

BESSIE

Finally, we can get back to our nap.

(BOTH COWS LAY DOWN. A FEW SECONDS LATER, NADINE STARTS TO SNORE AGAIN. COWS GROAN. SUDDENLY A DONKEY HEEHAWING IS HEARD FROM

THE BACK. DONALD DONKEY COMES QUICKLY DOWN THE AISLE TO THE STAGE. BESSIE AND ESTHER WAKE UP.)

DONALD  
(Very distressed.)  
Hello! Hello! Is anybody in there?

ESTHER  
Yes. Come in!

BESSIE  
What's the matter, dear sir.

(DONALD COMES UP ON STAGE AS NADINE WAKES UP FROM THE COMMOTION.)

DONALD  
I'm looking for...

(ALL THE ANIMALS FACES LIGHT UP WITH SURPRISE AS THEY RECOGNIZE EACH OTHER.)

ESTHER  
Donald!

DONALD  
Esther! Bessie! Is it really you?!

NADINE  
(In shock. Rubs here eyes.)  
Oh no! Tell me I'm having a nightmare. Somebody please wake me up. Kick me, quick!

(BESSIE AND ESTHER LOOK AT EACH OTHER AS IF THAT WERE A GOOD IDEA.)

BESSIE  
Shame on us for even thinking that.

DONALD  
What are you doing here?

ESTHER  
We moved here from Bethlehem several years ago.

BESSIE  
Yes, and we are very pleased with the accommodations.

ESTHER  
Oh yes, it just has home written all over it.

BESSIE

And the neighborhood is simply adorable. This nice elderly mule couple lives just down the street and...

NADINE

Would you both please stop your chomping. The real question is what are YOU (to Donald) doing here and when are you leaving?

BESSIE

(Scolding.)

Oh Nadine!

DONALD

Yes. I'm not here to visit. I'm looking for my wife and son.

ESTHER

(Excitedly.)

You're married.

BESSIE

Oh, the beautiful union before God of two animals always gets me choked up. What could be more beautiful?

DONALD

The problem is, I can't find them. The last time I saw my wife and son they were standing at the barn next door. I went to run an errand and the next thing I knew they were gone.

ESTHER

What do they look like?

NADINE

What do you think they look like? They're a couple of donkeys.

BESSIE

Wait a minute. I think I do remember seeing two donkeys out there yesterday.

DONALD

Yes. That's when I saw them last.

BESSIE

It seems like two men took them away.

DONALD

Do you know who the men were?

BESSIE

Not exactly.

ESTHER

Think Bessie! We've got to help him.

BESSIE

Well, I couldn't say for sure, not with my bad vision and all...

ESTHER

Oh the years have not been good on Bessie's eyes.

BESSIE

But I think they were some of the men who go around with Jesus.

DONALD

You still see Jesus?

ESTHER

Oh yes, Donald. Every chance we get.

BESSIE

Ever since that night in Bethlehem when Mary rode in on your back and the little baby was born, we've followed our Lord wherever he preaches.

ESTHER

He gives us hope when nothing else can. Even if your family isn't with him, he can surely help you.

NADINE

Don't you see him anymore?

DONALD

I've meant to. I really have. That night that I carried his mother into the stable in Bethlehem and saw the Lord born as a little baby, I promised I would follow him - but it hasn't been easy.

BESSIE

That's okay. It's hard for everyone.

DONALD

No, you don't understand. It's been too many years since I last saw Jesus. He's probably forgotten me, or is mad at me for abandoning him for other things.

ESTHER

I can assure you that he will greet you with open arms Donald.

BESSIE

Jesus even loves Nadine. He certainly has room in his heart for you.

DONALD

Then I should find Jesus. Hopefully my wife and child will be nearby. I would like to stay and visit, but surely you understand.

ESTHER

Of course we do.

(DONALD STARTS TO LEAVE AND THE COWS LOOK AT EACH OTHER.)

BESSIE

(To Esther.)

Are you thinking what I'm thinking?

ESTHER

Of course I am, Bessie. Donald wait!

BESSIE

(To Nadine.)

Do you want to come with us, or are you going to stay here by yourself?

NADINE

If I go I'm not going to like it.

ESTHER

We wouldn't expect anything less.

(THE FOUR ANIMALS EXIT TOGETHER.)

SONG: LIGHT IS THE SOUL

Light is the Soul

(Chorus)

Dark is the house, but light is the soul,  
Jesus my Saviour, He makes me whole,  
I'm not lonely, and I'm not afraid anymore.

Sometimes the world can be, a lonely place you see,  
It's a tragedy I'm crying for help.  
Then I found the key, to the mystery,  
Thought that I was through, but I will get by, because...

(Chorus)

I've wandered through all time, questioning my life,  
Had no place to really call my own.  
But when I looked toward, the heavenly reward,  
I knew that everything would work out fine, because...

(Chorus)

Now my life's complete, the Lord my God I'll meet,  
When glory comes to me on Judgment Day.  
My wish for you my friend, is that you'll let him in,  
His arms are open wide, he's calling you home, because...

(Chorus)

So drink of the wine, and eat of the bread,  
Take part in the feast, give thanks to the lamb,  
Because you're not lonely, and you're not afraid anymore.

(Chorus)

Act 2

SCRIPTURE READER

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold the doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous signs can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

John 2:13-25

NARRATOR

The four animals left towards Jerusalem in search of Donald's family. They attempted to follow Christ where he went, but Jesus and the disciples moved too fast for the old animals to keep up. Before nightfall they came to a place outside Jerusalem where Jesus had just been seen.

(NADINE, DONALD, ESTHER AND BESSIE ENTER FROM THE BACK. THEY ARE WALKING SLOWLY AND ALL LOOK VERY TIRED. DANNY DOVE IS SITTING ON THE STAGE CRYING WITH HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS. HE DOES NOT NOTICE THE ANIMALS COMING.)

NADINE

We have to stop. My hooves are killing me!

DONALD

Tell me about it. I'm so hungry I could eat a horse!

NADINE

I beg your pardon!

DONALD

But I probably wouldn't.

BESSIE

Let's rest by this temple for awhile.

(THEY APPROACH THE STAGE AND LOOK AROUND.)

DONALD

What a mess!

ESTHER

(Seeing the bird.)

Little birdie, what's the matter? Why are you crying?

DANNY

(He realizes that someone is there and stops crying. He punches out in defense.)

Who's cryin'?

BESSIE

You were cute little birdy wirdy!

DANNY

Let's get something straight lady. First, I wasn't cryin. And second, I ain't cute, I ain't little and I sure ain't a birdy wirdy. I'm a dove. You can call me Danny Dove - unless you wanna step outside and fight about it?

ESTHER

Nadine, we seem to have stumbled upon one of your relatives.

NADINE

Very funny.

DANNY

Who's the goat?

NADINE

(Very defensively.)

I am not a goat, thank you very much.

DANNY

(Looking her over.)

Oh yeah. I guess you're a lot bigger than a goat.

DONALD

What happened here? What's this mess?

DANNY

Jesus was here. He got real mad when he saw what the people were doin' to his Father's house. "My house will be a house of prayer," he said, "but you have made it a den of robbers."

BESSIE

What people did he say that to?

DANNY

The big wigs. The chief priests and teachers of the law. They were sellin' things at the temple. (Pause.) Some of the people are turnin' against Jesus.

NADINE

What are they doing?

DANNY

I heard some of 'em talking about planning to kill Jesus. Don't worry though, I'm taking care of them.

DONALD

How do you plan to do that?

DANNY

I've already started my plan. When I heard those people talkin' about killing Jesus, I did one of my fly by missions - if you get my drift. (Proudly.) I hit five of 'em right on the head.

NADINE

Now I remember why I hate birds.

BESSIE

Danny, try and remember what Jesus said. He would have turned the other cheek.

NADINE

He did - in a twisted sort of way. But anyways, I agree with Danny! Anybody who tries to mess with Jesus has to mess with me first!

ESTHER

Nadine, I'm sure you and the dovinator would make an excellent team, but don't you all see what's happening? This is exactly what the prophets wrote about in the great books. All of the things they said about Jesus are coming true.

BESSIE

The son of God is here on earth and the people are going to kill him.

DANNY

Maybe that's what you bunch of farm animals think. But I'm a dove, and a real dove wouldn't sit around and watch the best thing that's ever happened around here be taken away. No way, no how!

ESTHER

Little bird...

DANNY  
(Interrupting.)

Danny.

ESTHER  
Danny, don't you see? This is God's will. This is Jesus' will.

DANNY  
To die!?

ESTHER  
He has to die as a sacrifice for our sins.

NADINE  
She's right, you know. This is God's gift to the world. It's the greatest gift of love ever given. The gift of Jesus' life is for forgiveness from our sins.

BESSIE  
When Jesus was born, we knew this day would come. I just can't believe it's almost here.

ESTHER  
We all need God's grace when we mess up. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Pause.) Ooh! I like that. Somebody write it down.

BESSIE  
So God sent Jesus here so that we could be forgiven of our sins. Do you realize what an awesome gift of love that is?. That God sent his only son, knowing the pain and suffering he would go through here on earth?

DONALD  
I'm afraid I don't have enough love that I could ever give a gift like that. (Pause.) My son and wife are missing. And when I think about losing them as a sacrifice for others, I just begin to get a picture of how much God loves every one of us.

ESTHER  
Don't worry Donald, we're going to find them.

BESSIE  
You haven't seen a young donkey and his mother, have you?

DANNY  
No.

DONALD  
We'd better be going then. We have to find Jesus. I think my family will be nearby.

DANNY

Then I'm goin' with you. I heard that Jesus is going into  
Jerusalem. I know the way. Follow me!

SONG: FOLLOW ME

Follow Me

(Chorus)

Follow me

If you need the light that comes from the son,  
And if you need the rock to build your house on,  
And if you need the salt that makes up the earth,  
And if you need the ties that bind us as one.

I come to you when I can't go on and you help me make it through,  
I cried out you came, my life was saved today.  
You say to me..

(Chorus)

I was lost but now I'm found, was still but now I'm sound,  
I see the light again,  
I don't cry I smile, because I am your child.  
You say to me...

(Chorus)

In your time of trial, he'll stand by you, he'll stay all through  
the night,  
Rest assured to know that Jesus loves you so.  
He'll say to you... (Chorus 2X)

Act 3

SCRIPTURE READER

"As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes."  
Luke 19:41-42

(OLIVER OX WALKS OUT. HE LOOKS WEAK AND TIRED. SUDDENLY, TWO PESKY GOATS COME UP AND START TO ATTACK HIM. THEY KICK HIM AND HIT HIM. OLIVER FALLS TO THE GROUND AND LAYS THERE. GOATS TAKE HIS COLLAR AND RUN OFFSTAGE.)

NARRATOR

The animals embarked on the last leg of the journey to Jerusalem. Though the road wasn't long, it seemed to last forever for Donald, as he frantically searched for his wife and son. And on the way to Jerusalem, the five animals had an encounter they would never forget.

(THE FIVE ANIMALS ARE WALKING. BESSIE, ESTHER, DONALD AND NADINE ARE ALL WORN FROM THE WALKING. THE YOUNG DANNY IS KEEPING UP JUST FINE THOUGH.)

NADINE

(Quiet at first.)

Ohhh! (Pauses, then a bit louder.) Ohhhh! (Pause, then dramatically grabs her back. Louder so that someone will respond.) Ohhhhh!

ESTHER

(Quickly. But not knowing how to say it.)

Nadine...dear...my good friend...

ALL

Shut up!

NADINE

I can't take this. My back is about to give out. Old horses just weren't designed for this kind of labor. I should be in a barn somewhere lying down, with some handsome farmer bringing me hay and water. And a servant to comb my mane. What have I done to deserve this? Someone please tell me what...

DANNY

You know, I think Mrs. Ed here is under the false impression that she's getting paid by the word - and that just ain't how it works.

ESTHER

Remember what Christ said Danny, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged."

DANNY

It ain't easy.

BESSIE

Trust us, (Esther joins in) we know.

NADINE

(Comes to a sudden stop and sniffs.)

Wait!

DONALD

What is it, Nadine?

NADINE

I think we're getting close to your family, Donald.

ESTHER

This is fantastic! Do you see them?

NADINE

No, but I think I smell donkey. (Takes a whiff, then starts to choke and gag from the smell.) I take that back, I'm SURE I smell donkey.

(NADINE STARTS TO LEAD THE GROUP, HOLDING HER NOSE IN THE AIR SNIFFING. SUDDENLY SHE KICKS OLIVER ON THE GROUND AND TRIPS. NADINE SCREAMS AND OLIVER THE OX CRIES OUT IN PAIN. NADINE AND THE OX ARE BOTH ON THE GROUND.)

BESSIE

Oh dear!

ESTHER

How terrible, look at that poor ox!

NADINE

That poor ox?! What about me? What about my back?

DONALD

What happened, sir?

OLIVER

Call me Oliver. I was walking along the road when these pesky goats came out of nowhere and attacked me. They took my collar. I'm already old and weak. I don't know if I can make it back to my farm.

BESSIE

(To the other animals.)

We have to help this poor ox.

NADINE

Am I going to sit here all day, or is somebody going to help me up?

(ALL IGNORE NADINE.)

DONALD

I hate to be rude, but I have to get into Jerusalem. Jesus might already be there, and I have to find my family.

ESTHER

We can't just leave this poor animal here on the side of the road. He'll die for sure.

DANNY

If those pesky goats come back, I'll take care of them.

BESSIE

It's not the goats I'm worried about, it's the hurt ox.

NADINE

I'm growing old down here.

DONALD

But Jesus is probably in Jerusalem. If I wait too long, I won't find him, and I might never see my family again.

ESTHER

This ox is Jesus.

DONALD

What?

DANNY

I don't mean no disrespect to a nice cow like you, but them's fightin' words!

NADINE

Oh look the moon is going by, there goes another month.

BESSIE

That's not anything against Jesus. Jesus said so himself.

DONALD

He never said he was an ox.

ESTHER

Remember what Jesus said about the righteous when the Son of Man comes back?

BESSIE

The Lord will reward them for feeding him when he was hungry and caring for him when he was sick.

DANNY

I remember, but they won't even know what God is talking about.

DONALD

I know too, they ask the Lord, "When did we see you hungry and feed you, or give you clothes when you needed them."

NADINE

(Still on the ground.)

And the Lord will answer, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Great story. Now would somebody please help me up!!!!

(BESSIE GOES OVER AND STARTS TO HELP NADINE UP.)

DONALD

I know you're right, but I can't stay here. I have to go into Jerusalem.

(JUST AS NADINE IS ALMOST UP AND SAYS THANK YOU, A LOUD COMMOTION OF PEOPLE IS HEARD FROM THE BACK. BESSIE DROPS NADINE AND SHE FALLS TO THE GROUND AGAIN, BUT NOT WITHOUT SCREAMING.)

BESSIE

What is that?

ESTHER

Fly ahead and look, Danny.

(DANNY RUNS UPSTAGE AND LOOKS OUT.)

DANNY

It's Jesus! He's coming this way with a large crowd. (Pause.) And he's riding on a young donkey.

OLIVER

Please, help me!

BESSIE

Quick, we've got to get Oliver out of the way before he's trampled.

(BESSIE QUICKLY HELPS NADINE UP AS DONALD SPEAKS. BESSIE, ESTHER, NADINE AND DANNY TRY AND MOVE THE OX, BUT THEY ARE NOT STRONG ENOUGH. NOISE ELEVATES.)

DONALD

My son is with Jesus. I have to go to him.

ESTHER

Help us. This animal will be killed.

(NOISE ELEVATES.)

DONALD

If I let him go by now, I might lose him in the crowd and never see him again.

(ANIMALS TRY DESPERATELY TO MOVE THE OX BUT ARE UNABLE. DONALD WANTS TO HELP, BUT STARTS TO GO TOWARD THE BACK WHERE THE NOISE IS GROWING LOUDER.)

DONALD

I'm sorry.

DANNY

Donald, please!

ESTHER

The crowd! It's coming!

BESSIE AND NADINE

Donald!

(AS THE CROWD COMES FROM THE BACK TOWARD THE GROUP OF ANIMALS, DONALD LOOKS BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN HIS SON AND HIS FRIENDS HELPING THE OX. RIGHT AS THE CROWD IS COMING, HE QUICKLY HELPS THE ANIMALS. THEY SUCCESSFULLY MOVE OLIVER OUT OF THE WAY. THE CROWD COMES QUICKLY UPON THEM AND PUSHES THEM TO THE SIDE. DONALD CANNOT SEE. JESUS GOES ON STAGE WITH THE YOUNG DONKEY. THE PEOPLE ARE JUST MAKING NOISE, NONE OF IT IS COMPREHENDABLE, EXCEPT FOR THE CHILDREN SHOUTING HOSANNA! THE ANIMALS PEEK UP OVER THE CROWD.)

ESTHER

Donald, can you see your son?

DONALD

No!

(THE NOISE MAKES EVERYTHING CHAOTIC.)

DONALD

Help me! Somebody help me!

(SUDDENLY EVERYTHING BECOMES QUIET.)

NADINE

What happened?

(JESUS MOTIONS FOR THE CROWD TO BREAK. THEY DIVIDE, LEAVING  
A WALKWAY BETWEEN DONALD AND HIS SON.)

BESSIE

Donald! Your son!

DONALD

Jesus really does remember me!

(ALL FREEZE AS THE MUSIC INTRO. BEGINS.)

SCRIPTURE READER

"Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were  
written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not  
have room for the books that would be written."

John 21:25

SONG: 'TIL THE END OF TIME

'Til the End of Time

When I left, didn't say goodbye,  
You cried a tear as if I'd died.  
And now I'm back and I can't believe,  
After what I've done you still cry for me...

(Chorus)

And I know, you said you loved me,  
But I didn't know 'til the end of time.

You said to follow me.  
Now the truth has set me free.  
Your light's the only way,  
That I can make it through today.

I came home and found an open door,  
But I didn't expect to really find much more.  
The look on your face I'll never forget,  
As you welcomed me in and you gave me this gift...

(Chorus)

Please don't cry, I'm home to stay,  
I'll never leave you or go astray.  
I guess you know that I'm lying again,  
I'm gonna fall and I'll need your hand... (Chorus)