

Convicted criminals

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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My dad's been a church musician for years. I cut my musical teeth filling in where needed: whichever instrument, whichever voice part. Also: whichever role in the large-scale musicals the church staged, where I was an odd combination of ringer and gofer. Sometimes I sang the role that was too high or too difficult for others. Other times I was called on for thankless work, like the time I had to understudy—not play, understudy—the back half of a two-man donkey costume.

One role fell into both categories. My dad cast me as the criminal who dies on Jesus' right, mostly because we had this [great wailing epic](#) of a song for the character to sing. But first I had to hang on a cross for what seemed like hours, wearing just this weird diaper thing, while Jesus and the choir sang [last word after last word](#). (Pity the guy on Jesus' left; at least I got a song.)

My much-younger sister has a vivid childhood memory of walking into church and seeing me hanging up there. First she was scared. Then she figured out that it was a play, but she was confused because she hadn't heard that I was playing Jesus. Finally she realized that I wasn't — I was just some other guy being crucified.

We don't always remember the two unnamed criminals who die alongside Jesus. . . .
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