Pew 17

Pew 17 — Short Christian Playlet (20 min)

WHAT

One wooden pew. Four scenes. The same row of a small country church in 1965, 1985, 2005, and the present day. Different families. Same questions about God. The first family is a young couple holding a baby through a long sermon, arguing softly about whether to keep coming. Twenty years later, a teenage daughter slumps next to her mother during a hymn she finds stupid. Twenty years after that, that same daughter, grown, sits beside her dying father. Today — her own teenage son, who never knew his grandparents, sits alone in the pew on a Sunday she dragged him to. The mailing list, the carpet, the praise song catalog have all changed. The pew has not. The final beat is a wide shot of all four families on stage at once, frozen in their decade, all praying the Lord's Prayer together.

THEME

The story of Jesus moves through generations on the backs of ordinary, doubting, faithful people. Hebrews 12:1 staged.

WHO

BENJAMIN (1965) — Late twenties. Coal-mining country. White shirt, no tie left. Holds the baby.

MARLENE (1965) — Late twenties. Sunday hat. Gloves. Tired in the bones.

BABY (1965) — Wrapped, asleep, briefly fussing. (A doll is fine.)

KATIE (1985) — Sixteen. Slump. Rolled eyes. A copy of Catcher in the Rye in her purse.

MARLENE (1985) — Forty-five now. The same Marlene, twenty years on. Coat, scarf, hairs of gray.

KATIE (2005) — Now thirty-six. Holding her father BENJAMIN's hand. He is dying. She is praying.

BENJAMIN (2005) — Sixty-five. Frail. Eyes still bright. The pew remembers him.

KATIE (TODAY) — Fifty-six. Mother of LUKE. Tired. Returning to the pew the way you return to a house you used to live in.

LUKE (TODAY) — Sixteen. Hood up. Earbuds in one ear. Has not been to a church service since he was nine.

PASTOR'S VOICE — Offstage in each decade — the only voice that does not change.

HOW (STYLE / TONE)

The pew is the only set piece. A simple wooden pew, painted the same small-town brown across all four decades. It sits center stage on a shallow riser. The lighting

GODSVERSE.ORG AT WATERMARK REMOVE TO SCRIPT PURCHASE

changes by decade — warm tungsten in 1965, cool fluorescent in 1985, soft lamp light in 2005, neutral white today. Costume changes happen onstage in dim lighting between scenes — the actors should remain visible the whole time. A simple stained-glass gobo on the back wall stays consistent through every scene. The PASTOR'S VOICE is offstage and never seen. The same actor plays it across all four decades. By the final scene, all four families are on the pew at once — sitting in different decades of the same wooden bench.

PROPS

- A simple wooden pew, painted small-town brown
- A baby doll wrapped in a knit blanket
- A 1960s hymnal
- A 1980s church bulletin and a worn paperback Catcher in the Rye
- A 2000s prayer card
- A modern smartphone with one earbud cord trailing
- A stained-glass gobo on the back wall
- A small offering plate (passes through every decade)

TIME

20 minutes

Scene 1 — 1965, The Long Sermon

(Lights up — warm tungsten. The pew is empty, except for a small brass plate at the end of the bench that reads ROW 17. BENJAMIN (1965) and MARLENE (1965) enter from stage right, the new baby in Benjamin's arms wrapped in a knit blanket. They sit. Benjamin's tie is missing. He keeps tugging at his collar. Marlene smooths her dress and folds her gloved hands. Offstage, faintly, a small congregation finishes a verse of an old hymn — a recorded sound, lo-fi, organ and uncertain altos. The summer light through the stained-glass window turns the dust in the air gold.)

PASTOR'S VOICE (offstage, with the warmth of a small-town preacher)
Beloved. Today's text is from the eighty-fourth psalm. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts. My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord.

MARLENE
Ben. He is starting again.

BENJAMIN (whispering)
I know.

MARLENE
He went forty-three minutes last week. I timed it.

BENJAMIN

GODSVERSE.ORG AT WATERMARK REMOVE TO SCRIPT PURCHASE

He is a good man, Marlene.

MARLENE

Good men can also be long-winded men, Benjamin.

(The baby fusses. Marlene takes the baby from Benjamin and bounces it gently. The fussing subsides.)

BENJAMIN

She loves Sunday.

MARLENE

She loves the singing. Not the sermon.

BENJAMIN

Same as her mother.

MARLENE (a small smile)

Same as her mother.

Scene 2 — 1965, The Argument

MARLENE (very quietly)

Ben. I do not know if we should keep coming.

BENJAMIN

What.

MARLENE

The mine took your daddy. The fever took my mama. We walk into this church every Sunday and I sit in this pew and I ask God where he was.

BENJAMIN

And what does he tell you.

MARLENE

Nothing. He tells me nothing. The pastor goes on for forty minutes about psalms and the baby fusses and you keep tugging at your collar and I keep waiting.

BENJAMIN (after a long beat)

Marlene. I do not know that he tells me anything either. But this pew was here when my granddaddy was a boy. And his granddaddy. The pew has been here longer than the suffering. I do not — I cannot leave the pew, Marlene.

MARLENE

Why.

BENJAMIN

GODSVERSE.ORG AT WATERMARK REMOVE TO SCRIPT PURCHASE

Because the people who sat in it before us did not have answers either. And they came anyway. And we are here. So I figure something is keeping the line.

MARLENE

Keeping the line.

BENJAMIN

Yeah. That is what my daddy used to call it. He said you do not always come to church to hear from God. Sometimes you come to keep the line. So somebody who is being born in 2050 still has a pew to sit in when the mine takes their daddy.

MARLENE (looking down at the baby)

She is going to grow up here, Ben.

BENJAMIN

I hope so.

MARLENE

She is going to sit in this pew when she is sixteen and roll her eyes at this pastor.

BENJAMIN (smiling)

Yes she is.

MARLENE

She is going to sit in this pew when you are dying.

(Benjamin does not answer right away. He looks at her. He looks at the baby. He looks at the back of the pew in front of him.)

BENJAMIN

I hope she does, Marlene. I hope she does.

(Marlene does not answer. She rests her head on Benjamin's shoulder. The baby sleeps. The lights dim slowly.)

PASTOR'S VOICE (offstage, fading)

Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

Scene 3 — 1985, The Slump

(Lights shift — cool fluorescent. The 1965 family exits. KATIE (1985) and MARLENE (1985) enter and sit in the same pew. Marlene is twenty years older — coat, scarf, gray at her temples. Katie is sixteen, slumped, holding a paperback Catcher in the Rye half-open inside a church bulletin.)

PASTOR'S VOICE (offstage, the same voice, slightly weathered)

GODSVERSE.ORG AT WATERMARK REMOVE TO SCRIPT PURCHASE

Friends. The text this morning is also from the psalms. Eighty-four. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord.

KATIE (whispering)
Mom. He preaches the same sermon every six years.

MARLENE
I know.

KATIE
Why are we here.

MARLENE
Because it is Sunday.

KATIE
That is not a reason.

MARLENE
It is the reason your father gave me, the year before you were born. He said, the pew has been here longer than the suffering. We come.

KATIE (rolling eyes)
That is so not a reason.

MARLENE (gently)
Katie. One day you will have suffered something. And you will sit in a pew somewhere. And you will understand.

KATIE
I am suffering right now. The hymn we just sang was stupid. The harmonies were wrong. The preacher's wife wears the same hat every week.

MARLENE
Katie.

KATIE
Sorry.

(A long beat. Katie looks down at her book. Then up at the stained-glass window.)

KATIE (very quietly)
Mom. I want to want to be here.

MARLENE (taking her hand)
I know, baby. That is enough for now.

KATIE
Is that — is that allowed? Wanting to want? Without — without the actually wanting?

GODSVERSE.ORG AT WATERMARK REMOVE TO SCRIPT PURCHASE

MARLENE

Katie. Half the people in this room are wanting to want. The other half are just better at hiding it. Your father wanted to want for the first eight years of our marriage. Then one Tuesday he stopped wanting to want and started actually wanting. He could not tell you when it changed. He just woke up one morning and his hand reached for the Bible before his coffee, for the first time in his life.

KATIE

What if it never changes for me.

MARLENE

Then you will sit in this pew anyway. Because the pew is not waiting on you to figure it out. The pew is waiting on you to keep showing up. The figuring out is the Lord's work. He has been very patient with me. He will be patient with you.

KATIE

Mom. Why does Daddy come.

MARLENE (after a beat)

Because his daddy did. And because somewhere along the way, the wanting to want became wanting. And the wanting became something he could not have left if he tried.

KATIE

I do not believe in the same God you do.

MARLENE

Baby. There is only one God. He has been very kind to put up with everybody believing in him sideways.

(Katie almost laughs. She closes the paperback. She slides it deeper into the bulletin. She looks at the stained-glass window.)

Scene 4 — 2005, The Hand

(Lights shift — soft lamp light, golden, low. The 1985 figures fade out. KATIE (2005) and BENJAMIN (2005) enter. Benjamin is now sixty-five, frail, leaning on Katie's arm. They sit. Katie holds his hand.)

PASTOR'S VOICE (offstage, weaker now)

Beloved. Today's text is from the eighty-fourth psalm. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts.

BENJAMIN (almost laughing)

Katie. He is preaching it again.

GODSVERSE.ORG AT WATERMARK REMOVE TO SCRIPT PURCHASE

KATIE
I know, Daddy.

BENJAMIN
Forty years he has had to come up with another psalm.

KATIE
He keeps the line.

BENJAMIN (looking at her)
Where did you hear that.

KATIE
From you. When I was sixteen. You said it once and I rolled my eyes and Mom hit me on the arm. I have been carrying it for twenty years.

BENJAMIN (squeezing her hand)
Daughter.

KATIE
Daddy. I am scared.

BENJAMIN
I know, baby.

KATIE
I do not know how to do this without you.

BENJAMIN
You will sit in the pew. You will keep the line. The pew was here before us. The pew will be here after us. The Lord has been holding it down longer than any of us.

KATIE (crying quietly)
Daddy.

BENJAMIN
I am not afraid, Katie. I have been sitting in this pew for sixty-five years. I have been listening. The Lord is with me. He will be with you.

KATIE
Daddy. Do you remember the year I was sixteen. The year I told Mom this hymn was stupid.

BENJAMIN (smiling, almost laughing)
I remember. Your mother told me at supper. She was so embarrassed. I told her, leave her be, she is keeping the line in her own way.

KATIE

GODSVERSE.ORG AT WATERMARK REMOVE TO SCRIPT PURCHASE

What did Mom say.

BENJAMIN

She said, that girl is going to walk away from God for a decade and walk back twice as fast.

KATIE (laughing through tears)

She was right.

BENJAMIN

Your mother was right about almost everything, Katie. The only thing she was ever wrong about was thinking she was not enough. She was always enough. She was the sturdiest pew in this room.

KATIE

I miss her, Daddy.

BENJAMIN

I am about to see her, baby. I am going to tell her the same thing. I am going to tell her she was always enough. And I am going to tell her you sat with me in our pew the day I went home.

(He turns very slightly and presses his forehead to hers. The pastor's voice continues offstage, faint.)

PASTOR'S VOICE (offstage)

Blessed are those whose strength is in you. They go from strength to strength. Each one appears before God in Zion.

Scene 5 — Today, The Boy

(Lights shift — neutral white. The 2005 figures fade out. KATIE (TODAY) and LUKE enter from opposite sides of the stage. Luke has his hood up and one earbud in. He sits at the far end of the pew, away from his mother. Katie sits in the middle and folds her hands.)

PASTOR'S VOICE (offstage, a different timbre — younger, but somehow the same warmth)

Friends. Today's text is from the eighty-fourth psalm. How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts.

LUKE (under his breath)

Why are we here.

KATIE

Because it is Sunday.

LUKE

That is not a reason.

GODSVERSE.ORG AT WATERMARK REMOVE TO SCRIPT PURCHASE

KATIE (a small, real smile)
I know.

LUKE
I have not been here since I was nine.

KATIE
I know.

LUKE
Why now.

(A long pause. Katie looks at the stained-glass window. Then at her son.)

KATIE
Because your grandfather sat in this pew. And his daddy. And his daddy. And I am the only one in our family right now still sitting in it. And I do not want — I do not want the line to end with me.

LUKE
What line.

KATIE
The one of ordinary people who came when they did not know what else to do. Your grandfather called it keeping the line.

LUKE (still skeptical)
And the pastor still preaches the same psalm.

KATIE
Apparently.

LUKE
That is dumb.

KATIE (laughing softly)
Luke. Your great-grandmother said the exact same thing the year before I was born.

LUKE
She did not.

KATIE
She did. Word for word.

(Luke looks at the pew under his hand. He runs a finger along the wood. He pulls the earbud out of his ear, slowly, and lets it dangle.)

LUKE (after a long beat)
Mom.

GODSVERSE.ORG AT WATERMARK REMOVE TO SCRIPT PURCHASE

KATIE
Yeah.

LUKE
You said Grandpa sat in this pew.

KATIE
He sat in this exact pew, Luke. From 1965 until two weeks before he died. Same row. Same end. He used to call it row seventeen. Pew seventeen. That is what is on the brass plate at the end. Look down.

(Luke looks down at the end of the pew. He runs his thumb along an unseen brass plate. He looks up.)

LUKE
How did he keep coming. After everything that happened to him.

KATIE
He said the pew had been here longer than the suffering.

LUKE (slowly)
That is — that is actually kind of beautiful.

KATIE (very softly)
I know, baby.

LUKE
I do not know if I believe any of this.

KATIE
I know.

LUKE
I do not know if I am ever going to.

KATIE
Luke. Your great-grandmother sat in this pew when she was your great-grandmother's age and asked God where he was. He did not answer her. She kept showing up. By the time she died, she said the answer had become the showing up itself. I do not know if you are going to believe. I am asking you, just for today, to keep the line.

LUKE (under his breath)
Keep the line.

KATIE
Keep the line.

(Luke pulls the second earbud out of his ear. He winds the cord into his pocket. He sits up a little. He does not put his hood down — but he does not pull it tighter

GODSVERSE.ORG AT WATERMARK REMOVE TO SCRIPT PURCHASE

either.)

Scene 6 — The Lord's Prayer

(The lighting shifts. Slowly — almost imperceptibly — the 1965, 1985, 2005, and TODAY families all return to the stage and take their places on the pew at once. The pew is now four pews stacked in time, and yet it is one pew. Each family sits where they sat in their decade. The lighting holds them all. The PASTOR'S VOICE returns offstage, layered now — three or four voices speaking together, all the pastors of all the decades.)

PASTOR'S VOICE (layered, all four decades at once)
Let us pray. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

BENJAMIN (1965), MARLENE (1965)
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.

KATIE (1985), MARLENE (1985)
On earth as it is in heaven.

KATIE (2005), BENJAMIN (2005)
Give us this day our daily bread.

KATIE (TODAY)
And forgive us our trespasses.

LUKE (slowly, after a pause, half-mouthing it)
As we forgive those who trespass against us.

ALL (together, four decades at once)
And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.

Final Moment — Amen

(The four families turn slightly toward the audience. The pew, which has been one bench all along, is now visibly a single pew with four families on it, each in their decade, each in their light. The stained-glass gobo on the back wall holds steady.)

ALL (whispered, four decades together)
Amen.

(A long beat. Luke, of all of them, is the one who reaches out and rests his hand on the wood of the pew, the way a person rests a hand on the shoulder of someone they have just begun to know. Lights down — except for the stained-glass gobo, which glows a beat longer in the dark, and the small brass plate at the end of the pew that reads ROW 17. Then they too are gone. End.)

GODSVERSE.ORG
WATERMARK AT
REMOVE
TO
SCRIPT
PURCHASE

END

GODSVERSE.ORG
AT
WATERMARK
REMOVE
TO
SCRIPT
PURCHASE