

Good Friday Devotion

“Were You There” words are an African American Spiritual

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they pierced him in the side?

Were you there when the sun refused to shine?

Were you there when the sun refused to shine?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when the sun refused to shine?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Oh! Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

Philippians 2:5-11

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. **And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even***

death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It is that little word “even” in verse 8 which catches my attention as I read this passage again. For death, like life, brings its own raft of injustices. Death itself may be the great leveller, but death has many faces. To sit at the bedside of a woman in her nineties who anticipates with faith and joy her union with Jesus and her departure from the struggles of a long life is as different an experience as can be imagined from grieving the sudden, violent death of a young man through suicide. In both instances there will be tears and loss, but in one there will also be peace, hope and light, in the other a wild, dark rawness. The length (or shortness) of life, the manner of death, the preparedness of those around – all these factors profoundly affect how we experience loss and grief.



The death of Jesus was too soon, too violent, too sudden for his friends and followers – they were plunged into a wilderness of confusion and fear. Today, Good Friday, we enter into that experience with the disciples as we become a church in the wilderness, a church in grief, a church which

recognises and has to encounter pain, violence, loss, injustice.

In that encounter we are awed by what the cross demonstrates. The God in whom we trust is not a bystander to the pain, violence, loss and injustice of the world today. God understands the tears and despair of all who suffer today, and in a particular way stands in solidarity with all who suffer injustice. For God in Christ did not die a “good death” but the kind of death which can speak into the most appalling situations of human tragedy and cruelty for all time, “*even death on a cross*”.

We should not shrink from this day. The cross is repugnant, yet, strangely, as Christians we find ourselves irresistibly drawn to it. “Were you there?” we sing; with the clear implication that we need to be there. If we claim to follow the way of Christ we must follow him to the cross and learn from this symbol of violence, hatred and bigotry, for it is also the ultimate symbol of humility, healing and extreme love.

At the cross we acknowledge our own powerlessness, to change the course of history... to prevent the death of Christ... to solve the problems of today... but still we linger. We gaze at the crucified Christ and offer ourselves in humility and wonder to the God who “*therefore*” demonstrated the power of powerlessness.

Let us Pray, *Yes, we were there, Lord, yes, we were there; we know the grief which takes our courage away.*

Yes, we are here, Lord, yes we are here where self-pity and apathy are dispelled by your endless love.

Yes, we will go from here, Lord, yes we will go from here to those who cry out for justice, for healing, for peace.

*In your name and by your grace alone, we will go.
Amen.*

Devotion written by Jill Baker who will serve as Vice-President of the Methodist Church in Britain beginning June 2017.

Photo credit: a cross stands in the Judean wilderness. Taken by Jill Baker.