

March 20 2016
The Rev. Kimberly Reinholz
GHTC
Palm Sunday Lectionary

One of my most poignant memories of growing up in the church choir was hearing the hymn- "Were You there when They Crucified my Lord?" during Holy Week. I can't remember if it was sung at the end of the Palm Sunday liturgy or on Good Friday in my childhood parish, it might have been both. But I do remember the haunting melody and what to my adolescent mind sounded like accusatory lyrics.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

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 laid him in the tomb?

Many years later when I returned to the church, after about a decade of attending sporadically for essentially Christmas, Easter and Mother's Day, it was when I heard the hymn again that I was able to understand it not as an accusation but an invitation. An invitation to walk the way of the cross with Jesus, his disciples and the people of Jerusalem. This week as I prepared to preach this twofold memory informed my prayers and reflections on the vast amounts of scripture that we are given in the Palm Sunday liturgy.

This morning consider where you can join with your fellow disciples as we walk through the Passion together. Later today we are all invited to journey through the Stations of the Cross, and perhaps you will be able to take some intentional time this week to walk the labyrinth which will be set in the parish hall. For this moment however, I invite you to dwell with me in the question of if you were, or if you are there, in any of Jesus' last days in Jerusalem.

Were you there- when Simon assured Jesus that he wouldn't deny Him?

Were you there- when the exhausted and grief stricken disciples fell asleep?

Were you there- when Judas kissed his friend and teacher goodbye?

Were you there- when the unnamed disciple drew his sword to defend his savior?

I've been there- assured by faith in an upper room certain that I could take on the devil and all the evil in the world without fear and without reproach.

I've been there- overcome and overwhelmed by pain and loss waiting for it to be over and finding sweet respite in a nap or a goodnight's sleep.

I've been there- when I thought my course of action was best and I betrayed those closest to me for reasons that only I know.

I've been there- when it seems the world is going to eclipse Christ- I've jumped to defend him, although I was in reality powerless to do so.

Were you there- when the chief priests brought the temple police to the garden?

Were you there- when the High Priest examined Jesus?

Were you there- when Simon Peter denied Christ?

I've been there- following orders and only doing my job, forgetting that I have free will leaving my conscience at the door.

I've been there- asking Jesus to prove his divinity, his humanity, his messianic nature.

I've been there- afraid to affirm my faith when the going gets rough. I've denied my faith at times and denied my God as well.

Were you there- when Jesus was brought to Pilate?

Were you there- when Herod and Pilate sworn enemies became friends?

Were you there- when Pilate ignored his constitution, listened to the crowd and announced Jesus' conviction?

I've been there- a witness to hatred, bullying, racism, sexism, homophobia etc and I've pretended I do not see; thought there was nothing I could do, or worse participated in some passive way.

I've been there- when unlikely alliances were born over shared hatred and prejudice and I've done nothing to disrupt these friendships.

I've been there- when the hivemind overshadows my own and I go along to get along.

Were you there- when they called upon Simon of Cyrene to take up the cross?

Were you there- when the women of Jerusalem wept?

Were you there- when the criminals cried out?

I've been there- while no one expressly asked me to bear another's cross, I acted as partner dealing with loves burdens, child coping with parent's illnesses, parent witnessing the struggles of my child.

I've been there- having wept for my community, for the nation, for the world as darkness seems to overtake it, and light can barely shine through the injustice, violence, poverty, hate the evil face of humanity.

I've been there- crying out for salvation and remembrance in my own trials, which while they cannot be compared to crucifixion, honestly, but I empathize with the two who suffered next to Jesus in their desire to be saved and welcomed into the kingdom of God.

Were you there when Joseph asked for Jesus' corpse?

I've been there- I've asked for Jesus' body, and not just his body but also his blood.

I will be there again in a few minutes when we gather at the altar and take into ourselves the gifts of God for the people of God, the body and blood of Jesus Christ broken and shed for us in the Eucharist.

Today and for the rest of this week while we walk with all those who were with Jesus in Jerusalem in those last days. I am overcome with emotion. Emotion so huge that sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble because I was there, I am there, and I will be there again.

On this Palm Sunday I remember that, I was there when they crucified my Lord.

Amen.