

Were You There?
Palm/Passion Sunday
March 20, 2016

Were you there when they crucified my Lord? This time of year is defined by the music we sing. Just like at Christmas time, we come this day and week to sing the familiar hymns to remind us again of what was done on our behalf. One of these is a hymn attributed to the slaves of the deep south in the early 1800's – Were You There. Taken from their homes, forced into bondage, these slaves found a sense of hope in Jesus who was beaten, bruised, and hung from a tree like so many of them were during this time. In this hymn, they remembered that with eyes of faith we are all standing around that cross where we put Jesus.

And that is the power of this hymn to serve as a mirror reflecting back our own brokenness. So, were you there? Were we those in the crowd shouting and yelling, who is so excited when Jesus comes riding by, but are really willing to step out of the crowd and follow Jesus.

Or maybe, Peter. The disciple who swore he would never betray Jesus, but did three times. Or Pilate. He didn't seem to have a problem with Jesus, but yet was unwilling to fight the voices of the crowds in our world that would deny Jesus. It can be so easy to listen to the voices of our world pressuring us to keep our faith silent, than standing up, making waves, and being noticed for our faith.

It is difficult because we don't see the best side of humanity in the passion narrative. This is probably why people flock to Easter services wanting desperately to be Easter people, wanting to be a part of the joy and celebration of the resurrection. But we can't be Easter

people until we are first Good Friday people. People who look at themselves in the mirror and are honest in recognizing that we are at the cross of Jesus.

So, I could say, "Don't be like those who cheered one day and jeered the next. Be faithful and see yourself as Jesus' loyal follower every day, every moment, of your life."

But I want to go deeper as we remember that Jesus choose to go to the Cross. He wasn't distracted by the cheering because he knew exactly why he was in Jerusalem. He was there to give his life, for me, for you. He knew the path he had to walk.

There's our lesson. Practically everyone has known the taste of Palm Sunday, the sweetness of success and popularity, and nearly all of us have tasted the bitterness of Good Friday, of failure and rejection. What saves us from an endless round of ups and downs, what frees us from the tyranny of events over which we have no control is our commitment to press forward in obedience to God - it is trust in God's love to bring us from Good Friday to Easter morning, - knowing that the meaning of life is found in that old rugged cross where no matter who we are, no what sins we have committed they have been forgiven, where we find new life and new hope. So, were you there? I invite you this week in the midst of all that is going on in your lives to set aside some time to come and be there as we gather with Jesus in the upper room on Maundy Thursday and at the foot of the cross on Good Friday and at the tomb on Easter. Because that is why we come every year to read and remember and live out this story because we were there, at this cross where Jesus did so much for us knowing that even in pain and struggle and brokenness and death there is life. So, were you there? Let us with hope say yes, we were. [Sing Hymn 288 – vs 1 & 4]