

Were YOU there?

*A reflection on a favourite old hymn,
part of Geoff Oates' sermon from Passion Sunday*

There are so many beautiful and intimate hymns written for Holy Week. Hymns that try to draw us in imaginatively into the terrible and yet glorious events of Good Friday. One of the simplest, and therefore perhaps most effective is the old spiritual, 'Were you there?'

And of course there are times when we are happy to imagine ourselves at the heart of the action. "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" It invites us to imagine ourselves, faithful but passive watchers at the foot of the cross with Mary and the other women. Yes Lord, count me in there.

"Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?" Joseph of Arimathea's last act of decency and compassion, giving his own grave to a condemned man whose family could not otherwise expect a decent burial.

Yes, it's easy to identify with that.

We're there.

But we need to go on and ask ourselves some harder questions as well. Our experience of the dark hours between the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday and the celebrations of Easter morning is far from complete if we are happy to imagine ourselves only as innocent bystanders.

Were you there at supper that Passover night, when one disciple dipped his bread into the bowl with Jesus, and then sneaked out to betray him to his enemies?

Were you? It wasn't you, was it?

Were you there later that evening, in Gethsemane, whilst Jesus prayed? And did you watch with him as he bade you, or did your head droop in sleep? Were you there when the guards came to arrest him? Did you stand by your friend in his hour of trouble, or did you run away?

Were you there late into that night with Peter, when that servant girl came into the courtyard trying to flush our Jesus' supporters? Did you speak up for your Lord, or were the word of denial ready on your lips too?

Were you there on the Friday morning in the crowd, shouting for Barabbas, going along with noisy majority even when you knew in your heart that they were wrong? Were you there in the Governor's palace, did you turn aside like Pilate, cynically washing your hands, and letting an innocent man go to his death.

Were you there with the callous soldiers, thinking only of your own fun and profit, playing dice for the clothes of the man they had hung up to die up above them. Were you there when **we** crucified our Lord?

I was.

Cast your minds back 20 years or so to another time of great grief and guilt. When Princess Diana died, there was much pointing of fingers, much allocation of blame, even if you forget all the silly conspiracy theories that have buzzed around ever since. Blame the paparazzi, in their ruthless hunger for sensational stories; blame the Royal family in their want of warmth and compassion; blame Al Fayed for his ambition; all were accused of pushing Diana, more or less directly, towards that fatal car ride in Paris.

One journalist made a very wise observation, turning the fingers straight back at the accusers. Everyone, he wrote, who ever bought a newspaper or a magazine, or watched a TV programme, because it contained some salacious or intrusive rumour or saucy photograph of Princess Diana, must share the blame for her death. All that was done to her – was done in your name.

All Saints Alive

And so we must understand the passion of Christ. All that was done to him, was done in my name. And it is only as I acknowledge my part in it all, that I can also begin to understand that everything he did, he also did not just for mankind, but for me. Yes, I was there.

But it is only because I was there, in that dark span of days between Palm Sunday and Easter, that I can claim my right to be there when the sun rises again. I will be there with Mary in a garden on a Sunday morning, face to face with the Master I love.

I will be there with Cleopas and his friend, walking on the road to Emmaus that Sunday evening, and suddenly recognising my risen Lord as a guest at my kitchen table. I can be there, with Thomas a few days later in the Upper Room, and touch the wounds in his hands and side. For I know I share so many of Thomas's doubts as well.

I will be there. Because Jesus didn't just die to save the world. He died to save me. He died to save you.

The Trees of Bramfield Woods Preach about the Nature of Time

"Poor penitents rushing below!
The greenest wisdom is to slow
Each minute down so it appears
To last around a thousand years.
Below, Time is a brief transit,
An A to B, a worry fit.
We the trees of Bramfield Woods know
The Word of God, so upwards grow.
Above, Time twists into a curve
We love to veget'ly preserve:
The yesterdays we've stored within
Build up instead of blast our skin.
But tragic the tone, sad the Play
Where Time is feared and kept at bay!
From our pulpit panorama
We bemoan your comic drama –

Each Act an empire-race rerun
To beat the setting of the sun.
The only grievance for all trees
Is death so you can conquer seas.
If only you heard our appeal!
If only you knew Time is real!
Yet our green preaching goes unlearnt,
Though Time into our trunks be burnt."

Stephen Bardle

Earth's Awakening

All seems dull and gloomy at the beginning of
the year
In a few months the landscape changes gear
Of fragrant flowers of every colour and kind
Animals and Birds are playful, have mating in
mind
People marvel at vast changes evolving from
wintery gloom
Lush meadows, tidy gardens bring forth flowers
bursting with bloom
Our trees emerge with leafs in many shades of
green
Everywhere we look there is much to be seen
Of people taking on tasks at their leisure
Like birds watching, walking, talking and
enjoying every pleasure
We in turn should respect all that we own
Be grateful for this revival of life, so well sown
Into a patchwork of colour and life wherever
you look
Consider this regular seasonal change and the
short time it took
For our jewelled island emerges in such a bright
light
We are blessed seeing this wonderful sight
And delight in this reoccurrence. every spring
It can only uplift us with the joy it brings.

Mollie Day