

Broken Open: A Holy Week Retreat Experience

Today is Good Friday. My name is Nate Ross, and I am a 4th year Biology Major. Our theme today is Solidarity and Compassion: Prayer Opens Our Hearts.

What was it like that day, two thousand years ago, when Jesus of Nazareth was put to death? Did dark clouds cover the afternoon sky? Was the air hot and still? Did the city buzz with apprehension, or lag with disillusionment?

He said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit.

When the heart of our Lord beat its last beat, when the lungs of Christ Jesus exhaled their last breath, when the neurons of God incarnate fired their last signal, what happened? Did thunder rip apart the sky? Did the earth tremble in fear? Did horror and understanding strike the hearts of all? Or was it just another disappointing death, another disappointing day like any other?

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Where would I stand in that city on that fateful day? Certainly I am not a Roman soldier. Complicit and complacent, yes, but certainly I am not actively in oppression and sin? Yet, I am also certain that I am not the faithful disciple, "whom he loved." My heart tells me that I would not be a friend of the crucified, in loving and tender support at the foot of the cross. No, if I am honest, I am most like Zaccheus, the reluctant and repentant tax collector. A student of an oppressive and predatory system, yet one who feels only half as bad about it as he should.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Where was Zaccheus that day? Did he climb another tree to watch Christ's passion and death? Or did he arrive many hours later. Alone with the setting sun, dust on his sandals, laying his eyes upon that wooden cross, upon that blood and water on the ground?

Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree?

When the sons and daughters of God are crucified in this nation, in this world, as they are everyday, where am I? When our brothers and sisters breathe their last breath, when their hearts beat their last beat, when their synapses fire their last, I am nowhere close to it, nowhere close to it, nowhere close to it, nowhere close to it...

For those bodies and souls who composed this spiritual, *Were You There*, I imagine this question meant much more, and was more difficult to swallow than this purely imaginative exercise that it is for a white listener such as myself. Here I am, Zaccheus, arriving late to the death of Christ, gazing upon the signs and traces of violence, piecing together what must have happened, what it must have been like. Piecing it together from what I see and read on my phone, bits and pieces, fragmentary traces of the reality of death and suffering of my brother.

To all, suffering, dying, and crucified, Christ is with you. To all weeping and mourning at the foot of the cross, Christ is with you. To all nailing Christ to the cross, beware! Yet, Christ be with you. To all of us Zaccheus's, beware! Yet, Christ be with you.

For Christians, this death of Christ is the mystery of hope and redemption. By his entering into the mystery of death, and by his triumphing over it via his resurrection,

Jesus Christ redeems death for all humanity. In Christ we see and believe that there is nothing to fear in death, that in him all is forgiven. And so in Christ's own suffering and death, our death and suffering in this world is redeemed. This is our hope. This is our prayer.

Thank God it's Friday!

Finally I invite you to consider the reflection questions: What breaks your heart in this world? How are we called to be close to the broken body of Christ?