



*25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, **Woman, behold thy son!*** (John 19:25-26)

This hymn fits in appropriately for this season of Lent. It isolates the most momentous of events in the history of the world – the Crucifixion, burial and resurrection of the world's Creator. There is no individual human author to whom the hymn can be attributed. It came to be in the plaintive voices of those who knew great hardship and trouble – the African slaves of Colonial America. Perhaps the Author who transmitted the words and tune of this hymn to those poor and oppressed people was the Lord Himself.

The scale is called pentatonic – also known as the African scale since practically all negro spirituals are sung to that scale. *A pentatonic scale is a musical scale or mode with five notes per octave in contrast to a heptatonic (seven-note) scale such as the major scale and minor scale.* (Wikipedia) The hymn asks seven searching questions all of which begin with *Were you there?* But of course, you were there with me and every other member of the human race before, during, and after the event described. The operation of the Holy Spirit in the humble hearts of the slaves, who labored under the heat of the sun, is readily recognizable in the words they wafted on high from countless unshaded fields of cotton. As we examine these seven questions, examine your heart as well to answer *Were you there?*

Were You There

*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 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?*

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? Oh yes, you were there, my friend. Were it as the crowd-pleasing Roman Pontiff, the religious Jewish rulers, the dregs of society personified by the thieves and murderer Barabbas, or the easily swayed multitude who, only five days earlier, had welcomed the Lord with shouts of Hosanna and the laying down of palm branches in His path? Yes, Reader, you stood muster that day before the cross represented by one or more of the elements mentioned. Of course, one group that was conspicuously missing from beneath the cross was the greater number of disciples and Apostles of the Lord. Instead, they cringed in the bushes and undergrowth surrounding Mount Calvary as the sordid event took place. It was all of our sin that compelled Christ to the cross, not only a few. To consider the gravity of our guilt certainly gives cause to TREMBLE. Our trembling is punctuated by inexplicable joy, too, at the realization that our Lord Jesus loved us and gave His life that we might live.

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? Did you hear the muffled thud of the nails as they pierced His hands and feet? At His first coming, he was laid as a baby in a wooden manger at Bethlehem – now He is laid as a loving Savior on a crude wooden cross. If your spiritual ears cannot hear that awful nailing at the cross, perhaps a spiritual audiometric examination is in order by way of Holy Writ. The Roman cohort not only nailed our Lord to the cross but once He was fastened there, they lifted the cross to allow it to fall into a four-foot hole to hold it upright. When that cross struck the bottom, the jolt was excruciating (Latin: ex, from; cruci, cross - pain as from the cross). That jolt allowed his arms to be pulled out of joint so that breathing was much more difficult. *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.* (Psalm 22:14)

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 the one holding the spear who thrust through the Lord's side, or were you one of the leering crowd who trampled upon the Lord's Person by your unrepented sins of time past? Perhaps you were one of the disciples who lacked the courage to even remain steadfast at the cross while your Lord suffered for you. Perhaps you, too, denied Him, as did Peter, by your shame to

always publicly confess Him as Lord. His mother, Mary, was there since a mother's love knows no fear. That spear that pierced her Son was the same that pierced her own heart as she watched in wretched misery. *And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.* (Luke 2:34-35) Of course, there was no absolute absence of disciples. There was the beloved disciple John whom the Lord loved with particular affection. Love compels courage. And there were the women presence who risked life and limb out of a love sadly lacking in many today. They lingered there until it was over, and Christ had paid the last full measure of sacrifice for the Redemption of our sin.

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? I suppose many thought this was the ending of the affair. He is dead and done for. No more pestering the religious leaders with questions that assailed their fortunes and power structure. BUT IT WAS NOT THE END – IT WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING.! Our Lord was placed in a borrowed tomb where the wealthy were interred. He died between two thieves and was buried in a Garden Tomb! *9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.* (Isaiah 53:9) It is true, however, that our Lord only needed a very temporary tomb, So do we who believe have that privilege of a borrowed tomb. Were you there at that burial? Were you part of the Roman guard or the grave-attendants? Or were you there in the person of the beloved Mary Magdalene? Mary Magdalene, you might say, was the FIRST and the LAST. She was last at the sepulcher: *And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.* (Matt 27:60-61) And Mary Magdalene was the first at the Tomb on Resurrection morning, and first to see the Risen Lord. *But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping; and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, **Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?** She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, **Mary.** She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. (John 20:11-16) WERE YOU THERE?*

Two verses were omitted from the Hymnal: *Were you there when He rose up from the dead? And Were you there when He ascended up on high?* Surely, we shall want to be there for those events in our own glorified bodies.