

Minister protests execution in Huntsville during Holy Week

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HUNTSVILLE—Texas executed Adam Kelly Ward, 33, on Tuesday of Holy Week, and officers arrested Jeff Hood, a North Texas minister with Baptist roots, when he crossed the legal perimeter outside Huntsville’s Walls Unit and bowed his head to pray.



Jeff Hood with the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty is taken into custody for engaging in an act of civil disobedience outside the Walls Unit in Huntsville. (Photo / Ben Tecumseh DeSoto) “I can’t get over the sacramental nature of executions in Texas. Adam Ward is the Paschal Lamb of the hour,” said Hood, who grew up Southern Baptist and graduated from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

“We kill in an attempt to vanquish evil. That’s heresy, to believe anything other than the love of Christ can vanquish evil. ... We think we can teach people not to kill by killing. What are we really teaching our children?”



An officer instructs Jeff Hood to return to the area outside the yellow security-tape line in front of the Texas State Penitentiary in Huntsville. (Photo / Ben Tecumseh DeSoto) Hood chose to cross the “arbitrary line” outside the Texas State Penitentiary at Huntsville as an act of civil disobedience and an expression of religious liberty, he insisted.

The guard in the tower of the Walls Unit did not draw his weapon, and officers who confronted Hood attempted to persuade him to return to the area outside the security-tape line before they arrested him.

Hood spent nearly seven hours in the Walker County Jail. In a cell alone, he passed the time praying and singing hymns, saying, “It was almost like a worship service.”

“It was a profoundly spiritual experience,” Hood said. “I could feel God’s presence as I was standing firm. ... It was one of those moments when I felt like obedience to God demanded disobedience to the state.”



Jeff Hood is arrested and charged with criminal trespass for crossing the security-tape line outside the Walls Unit in Huntsville. (Photo / Ben Tecumseh DeSoto) Hood was charged with criminal trespass, a Class B misdemeanor, and given a May 19 court date.

In 2007, a Hunt County jury convicted Ward for the June 13, 2005, murder of Michael “Pee Wee” Walker in Commerce. Ward shot Walker, a housing and zoning enforcement officer, nine times with .45-caliber pistol while Walker was photographing code violations outside Ward’s father’s home.

On appeal, a federal district court recognized Ward as mentally ill—suffering from delusions, paranoia and bipolar disorder. But state and federal appeals courts ruled his illness did not rise to a level that disqualified him for the death penalty.

After the U.S. Supreme Court declined to intervene, Ward became the fifth person executed in Texas in 2016 and the ninth nationally.

Hood, who ministers to some inmates on Death Row, did not know Ward personally. But he insisted he felt compelled to travel to Huntsville for the execution because Jesus commanded his disciples to love their neighbors.



Protesters demonstrate outside the Walls Unit in Huntsville prior to the execution of Adam Ward on Tuesday of Holy Week. (Photo / Ben Tecumseh DeSoto) "You can't love your neighbor and kill him," said Hood, part of the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty. "It's a heart problem. It's a spiritual problem that we have become so comfortable killing someone created in the image of God."

In June 2014, Hood walked 200 miles from Livingston to Austin to call attention to more than 500 people Texas had executed in less than four decades and to pray for an end to capital punishment.

Baptists have a long history of public demonstrations, including defying laws when they run contrary to God's law, Hood insisted.

"There's nothing more Baptist than civil disobedience. I'm just carrying on the family tradition," he insisted.

"In my mind, this is the way of Jesus. I can't think of a better time or more intentional space than this to follow Jesus Christ."