



4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. 5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. 6 If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. 7 If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. (John 15:4-7)

27 And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. 28 And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. 29 But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. 30 And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. 31 And their eyes were opened, and they knew him (Luke 24:27-31)

This is one of the most beautifully spiritual hymns of the Church, written out of a heart that was aware that it would very soon be with the Lord and abide with Him forever. The venerable pastor, Henry F. Lyte, was dying of tuberculosis in 1847. He gave his farewell sermon at his church on Sunday, sat down at sunset and wrote this hymn, and then departed for France where he died three weeks later. The wife of William H. Monk (who wrote the tune for the hymn - EVENTIDE) was a member of the church in the congregation that last day. She stated: *"This tune was written at a time of great sorrow—when together we watched, as we did daily, the glories of the setting sun. As the last golden ray faded, he took some paper and penciled that tune which has gone all over the earth."* An excerpt of that farewell sermon reads:

“O brethren, I stand here among you to-day, as alive from the dead, if I may hope to impress it upon you, and induce you to prepare for that solemn hour which must come to all, by a timely acquaintance with the death of Christ.”

This is not only a sermon statement, but a dying testimony of a good Christian minister. For more than one hundred years following, the bells of Mr. Lyte’s church, All Saints in Lower Brixham, Devonshire, rang out the chime, “Abide with Me.” The hymn was also sung at the wedding of the daughter of King George VI (Queen Elizabeth II), and at the funeral of Mother Teresa in Calcutta, India.

Abide with me

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day;
Earth’s joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

I need Thy presence every passing hour.
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter’s power?
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death’s sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me

In the singing and hearing of this great hymn, one cannot but be reminded of the words of Job: *“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.”* (Job 19:25) The words of Job have been realized. We have a Savior who not only comes to us, will never forsake us, but who comes to ABIDE (live with forever) with us. Whether it is the last rays of the setting sun that glow from the distant horizon, or the fading light of life itself that warmly fades before the eyes of the saint, this hymn has direct appeal. The hymn has been played and sung all the days of my own memory and always inspires me to remember the day that I must go alone before my Lord and Savior with nothing in hand but those treasures that I may have deposited on High where neither rust or moth can devour.

“Abide with me; fast falls the eventide; The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me.” The sunset of the day, as well as the sunset of life, proceeds unabated with deliberate speed once the evening sun approaches the horizon. How surely we felt that the glorious day would never end at the morning sunrise, yet, once the sun begins to

fade and the light of day grows dim, how swiftly does the darkness pervade our world – or our souls. The body needs rest, and the Lord has provided the ideal of night for that rest. The soul also needs rest, and the Lord has granted, in His mercy, a final Haven of Rest for our souls.

“Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day; Earth’s joys grow dim; its glories pass away; Change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not, abide with me.” The glorious Sunrise of Heaven cannot come before the sunset of life closes our eyes in the sleep of death. At the final moment, when the soul is called forth from that earthen sanctuary that has been its home during the course of earthly life, all others of our acquaintance slowly fade into the dark shadows – our friends, family, medical attendants – all fade away. We are then left alone to cross that portal that bridges the Waters of Jordan River. At the last, we can call on no friend other than that One Friend who *“sticketh closer than a brother”* and Who has promised to never forsake or leave us alone. If we have not that Hand upon which to cling, we have no one to go with us across those turbulent Waters of Jordan Banks.

“I need Thy presence every passing hour. What but Thy grace can foil the tempter’s power? Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be? Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.” If we walk daily with the Lord, we shall have no difficulty in finding Him by our side when we depart from these troubled shores – He will be right with us – in our hearts, by our side, and the Light that Guides. This morning, a dear friend sent me her thoughts on the deep meaning, mystery and promise of a Psalm: *“Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple”* (Psalms 65:4) It is the Grace of God that enables us to abide in Christ, and His Grace that compels us to come, at first Light, to Him. He CAUSES us, in the first place, to approach that Throne of Grace reserved for His Elect. It is because of that Grace that we can dwell in His courts, and abide in His Love.

“I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless; Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness. Where is death’s sting? Where, grave, thy victory? I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.” The Christian knows in his heart that the key to abiding with family, with spouse and children, is the toleration and care imbued by LOVE. Love makes all things possible, and is more powerful than death. It is love that gave us our first primitive breath of life, and love which bridges the dark Valley of the Shadow of Death, and it is Love that draws us home to our abode in Christ. Having our Lord by our side, and in our hearts, we fear no power of man or beast. Death offers no terror but, rather, a respite. Since Love is stronger than death, LOVE will see us through that imagined terror. *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:38-39) This verse assures us of an eternity of Love and abode in Christ.

“Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes; Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies. Heaven’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee; In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.” As the flames grew tall before her shackled body, the sweet and virtuous Maid of Orlean (Joan of Arc) called for a Cross to be held before her dying eyes. This provided by an onlooker, she went her way as a gleaner of grace to her Lord. The flames of her consuming fire were blinded by that greater Light of Christ’s Love that burst through the dark shadows of her gloom. Perhaps at her last glimpse of life, she remembered the sweet words of Solomon: *“My beloved spake, and said unto*

me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.” (Song 2:10-13) The world is not good enough for His saints – **Come Away with Christ**. If we will abide in Christ at death, we must have first abode with Him in life. He raises His banner over us as was customary at the Banqueting House of the Wedding: *“I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.”* (Song 2:3-4)

These are the five verses we find in our 1940 Church Hymnal; however, the writer of the hymn composed three additional verses as included below. These seal the faith and hope of a man who had dedicated his entire life to serving the Lord and preaching His Word:

Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word;
But as Thou dwell’st with Thy disciples, Lord,
Familiar, condescending, patient, free.
Come not to sojourn, but abide with me.

Come not in terrors, as the King of kings,
But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings,
Tears for all woes, a heart for every plea—
Come, Friend of sinners, and thus bide with me.

Thou on my head in early youth didst smile;
And, though rebellious and perverse meanwhile,
Thou hast not left me, oft as I left Thee,
On to the close, O Lord, abide with me.

That last verse, (“Thou on my head in early youth didst smile; And, though rebellious and perverse meanwhile, Thou hast not left me, oft as I left Thee, On to the close, O Lord, abide with me,”) is a benediction on my own life. I can remember the personal moments of sunlit grace in my youth when God smiled warmly on me. I remember the terrible moments of my forgetfulness and rebellion against that Benign Love of Christ. But I always had the lingering assurance that Christ had not left me alone – even if I had tried to escape His bonds of Love. He gripped my hand as a loving mother does her child at a busy intersection. Like Peter, at the moment of my most hateful rebellion, He turned and looked at me, and my shame overwhelmed my soul. The close of the Door of Salvation, just as happened with the Door of Noah’s Ark, will soon close for each of us. It is critically important as to which side of the closed Door we find ourselves at death. Have we gone into the Presence of God to abide with Him, or do we remain without the Door (Christ) with the wild beasts and men of the world?