

Abide with Me

Meditation #1 Help of the Helpless, Oh, Abide with Me!

There are things that keep me up at night, and I hate it. I remember one time specifically. It was getting close to Christmas 2005. My wife and I had been married for just about 4 months. We were both full time students and part-time workers, but we found ourselves working at the same place in a completely miserable situation at work. What would we do? We don't really have a fall back. We need the money to pay our rent, tuition, food. We could continue working there at the expense of our mental health, to be given more sleepless nights dreading going in to work.

When the problems of the present that affect your future keep you up at night, where do you turn? Where do you turn at 2:00 am? Your wife is trying to sleep and trying not to think about the situation. Your Mom is asleep. Your friends are asleep. Who do you turn to? You risk it. You pick up the phone to call someone, anyone who might be able to help you. No one answers. You feel bad for even making their phones ring. Where will my help come from? The darkness is deepening as helpers fail and comforts flee. You toss and turn, worried about what to do next. As each hour clicks away, you know that the night is slipping through your fingers while the darkness of the night and your life deepens.

Whether it is one sleepless night when helpers fail and comforts flee or a year full of those nights, there is one who you can always turn to. He promises to always be your help. He promises to always abide with you as the help of the helpless.

God's Word from Psalm 121: **A song of ascents. I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip— he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD watches over you— the LORD is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life; the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.**

We sing Hymn 588:1.

Meditation #2 Oh Thou who Changest Not, Abide with Me!

As we are at the end of another year, I know I'm about to see some top 10 lists of all the celebrities who died in 2017 with some kind of statement about how devastating this year was with all the people who passed away. I'm not any more innocent than them because I've included in our Prayer of the Church those brothers and sisters in Christ who passed away in 2017.

As we have the prospect of a new year, we want to focus on what will be new, to put the past behind us, to have a start fresh, get over tragedy and embrace a new chapter in life. Yet, we are mortal. God sweeps us away in the sleep of death. We are consumed like grass, that we spring up in the morning but by the evening we are dried out and withered.

Death and decay are all around us as we recount who is no longer living in this world with us. And we know why death comes to us. It's because the wages of sin is death. We cannot escape ownership of our sins, the fact that we deserve death.

So, we plead to God with Moses, "Have compassion on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love... May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us." Out of his mercy, God treats us not as our sins deserve. Even though everything else decays and fades around us, God does not. Because he who abides with us changest not, neither does his undeserved love and mercy for us.

God's Word from Psalm 90: **A prayer of Moses the man of God. Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals." A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death— they are like the new grass of the morning: In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered. We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due. Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Relent,**

LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children. May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands.

We sing Hymn 588:2.

Meditation #3 Friend of Sinners, thus, Abide with Me!

How cool would it be for God to appear to us? Wouldn't that be something – to meet face to face with the Divine? That we would have a vision with some bright light but also a sense of peace and joy. It's a happy thought to meet with the Lord.

However, whenever an angel - just an angel - appears to people in the Bible, they are terrified! They try to bury their head in the dirt! In the presence of a holy, sinless being, people immediately recognize their inadequacies, their imperfections, their dreadful, sinful state. They know that they should be destroyed as a sinful person before a holy being.

As we reflect upon 2017, we no doubt call to mind our failures as well as our triumphs. We are a sinful people. We see it as the world and our bodies decay. So we know that if we met a holy being, met God, that meeting would strike fear in our hearts instead of peace.

As people cowered in fear before an angel, the angel almost always said, "Fear not." Why? I should be afraid. You are holy; I'm not. I deserve to die; you don't. The message "Fear not" is exactly what we need to hear because God is a friend of sinners, one who forgives all our sins, heals all our diseases, is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding love. God does not treat us as our sins deserve. We fear not our sinful state because God, the friend of sinners, abides with us and forgives all our sins.

God's Word from Psalm 103:1-13: **Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits— who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.**

We sing Hymn 588:3.

Meditation #4 On to the Close, O Lord, Abide with Me!

God-willing, with age comes wisdom. And with that wisdom, we look back on all the dumb stuff we did, the sins of our youth, we call them. We've broke all of God's commandments. Maybe we even wandered away for a time, maybe for a long time. I left God. Sins of our youth is a long list, maybe we even think an unforgivable list.

We have not always been faithful to God, but God has been faithful to us. He has chosen to love us in spite of our faithlessness. We chooses to forget the sins of our youth. Despite our rebellion, God still loves us. God's love and mercy is great, staying with me much longer than I ever stayed with God. He never leaves me, even though I oft have left him. Thanks be to God that he is good even when I am not. Thank the Lord that he abides with me even on to the close.

God's Word from Psalm 25:4-7: **Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good.**

We sing Hymn 588:4.

Meditation #5 Through Cloud and Sunshine, Oh, Abide with Me!

When do you need God? We need him when we are facing that surgery. We need him when we are down and depressed. We need him when I have financial troubles. We need him when I can't get rid of my guilt. We need him when I worry about everything. We need him when I need a purpose to life. We need him when the chips are down and life sucks.

What about when you seemingly don't need help, when everything is going well, when all the bills are paid and you even have extra money that you can spend on just fun stuff, when everything at work is going your way, when all your family relationships and your friendships are good, when life is nothing but sunshine and daisies, happy days?

It's when things are all going well that we are tempted to forget about God. That's when the devil whispers in your ear, "What do you need God for? You have everything well in hand." The temptation to neglect God and forget about him comes during the sunshine moments of life. We need him in the good times just as much as we need him in the bad times.

Thanks be to God that he abides with us and guides us through cloud and sunshine to foil the tempter's power. Even though I may forget about him during the good times, he never does. And when the bad times come and I feel forgotten, God reminds me that he never forgets me but continues to be good to me. So, we trust his unfailing love as he abides with us.

God's Word from Psalm 13: **For the director of music. A psalm of David. How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall. But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me.**

We sing Hymn 588:5.

Meditation #6 I Triumph Still if Thou Abide with Me!

The biblical picture of the Lord as my Shepherd has comforted Christians for some 3000 years. We love the peaceful setting of lying down in green pastures, being beside quiet waters, having our souls refreshed as God guides us, directs us through life.

Verse 5 of Psalm 23, though, is kind of uncomfortable. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." I'm sitting down to eat a meal with me enemies? And I'm being presented as the guest of honor, that my head is anointed with oil, my portions are so great that my cup overflows? Awkward. This seems like it would be some tense scene in a mobster movie that they would treat someone to a fine meal to then fit him with cement shoes and arrange him to sleep with the fishies.

God gives us this picture to show us how close he can bring us to danger, to death, and still have nothing to fear because he is our shepherd. The dangers of this life, the enemies who hate me and want to kill me, they are nothing as long as God is with me. I triumph still if God, my Good Shepherd, abides with me!

God's Word from Psalm 23: **A psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

We sing Hymn 588:6.

Meditation #7 In Life, in Death, O Lord, Abide with Me!

We Lutherans design our worship space to keep the Bible's central message before your eyes. You walk in to this sanctuary, and your eyes are drawn to the cross. They are drawn to an instrument of pain, of suffering, of death. But the cross is not just a symbol of bad things. It is a symbol of how much God loves you and me. It is a symbol of where God paid for my sins through his pain, suffering, and death. The cross is a representation of all that God has done for me, to save me. The cross is where God's justice meets its satisfaction when my sin, which must be punished, is by it being carried on Jesus' shoulders, that he was pierced for my transgressions, crushed for my iniquities, that the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed. The cross is where Jesus willingly gave up his life and committed his spirit into God's hands. No one took his life from him, but he gave it up freely to be our Savior from sin. The cross is a symbol of why we will go to heaven when this life is over.

We make the cross so prominent because we want it to be so prominent in our everyday life. We want the cross to be held before our closing eyes. God doesn't want us to navel-gaze, to look to ourselves and our lives and our efforts as we inch closer to the end of our lives. He wants us to look only at him and what he has done for us – the message of the cross. Because of what Jesus did there, because he allowed himself to be sacrificed for you and me even though he was innocent and perfect, we are saved, we are delivered. Because of the cross, God will never put you or me to shame. So, hold that cross before my eyes at all times. In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!

God's Word from Psalm 31:1-5, 14-16: **In you, LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, LORD, my faithful God. But I trust in you, LORD; I say, "You are my God." My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me. Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.**

We sing **Hymn 588:7**.

December 31, 2017

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