December 3, 2025

MESSENGER

Quote of the Week

"We are not yet perfect in our faith but we as we practice, we can get better. We can grow."

Pastor Connie In this week's sermon

INFO

Sermons are always available...catch up on the ones you haven't heard!

iTunes: bit.ly/AltadenaBaptistPodcast

On our website:

www.altadenabaptist.org/sermonaudio/

Also, check us out online:

Facebook (private group): www.facebook.com/groups/altabap

On the web: www.altadenabaptist.org

Contact Information:

Due to the fires, our mail has been forwarded. Please send mail to PO Box 91055, Pasadena, CA 91109. You may still call the church phone at 626-797-8970;

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WHEN “ABIDING” IS ALL YOU CAN DO

Henry Francis Lyte was born in 1793 to middle-class Scottish parents. His father deserted the family, and his mother died soon after. Henry was left as a seven-year-old orphan living in a boarding school, but he made the most of his educational opportunity. Even as a youth he wrote excellent poetry. His literary abilities led him into the study of theology, and he climaxed his education with ordination as a minister at the age of 22.[1]

During the next two decades, Henry served as a clergyman in several modest-sized congregations and, with his wife Anne, raised five children. All this time, the sub-plot of his life was almost constant respiratory illness: asthma, bronchitis and constant coughing were always part of his daily life experience. He was a tall, handsome man, but always a bit weak and sickly.

All this time he continued to express himself through poetry. Some of it had a dark side, reflecting his physical pain and suffering. It was when he was 44, in what should be the prime of his manhood years, that he wrote in a poem entitled *Declining Days*,

> Why do I sigh to find
>
> Life's evening shadows gathering round my way?

But when he turned his poetry toward God, Henry found a way of expressing the personal faith that continually lifted his spirit above life’s depressing realities. He wrote many hymns that he introduced to the congregations he was serving at the time. A number of them can be found in English church hymnals of today.The best-known Henry Francis Lyte hymns sung in American churches are *Jesus I My Cross Have Taken, Praise My Soul the King of Heaven* and --- top of the list --- ***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.

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(**Continued from other side**)

The story of how Henry wrote *Abide With Me* is particularly inspiring. During 1845 the doctors diagnosed Henry's increasing respiratory problems as tuberculosis. There was no known cure for this disease, but many sufferers were able to experience some relief (and possibly a few more years of life) by moving to a milder, sunnier climate. In Henry's time, the best places to go were along the Mediterranean coast in southern Europe. Henry and his wife made arrangements to move to Italy. Just before he left, Henry experienced a time of prayer and meditation that gave him great comfort.

The Bible passage he was reading was the story of Jesus' post-resurrection encounter with two of his disciples on the Road to Emmaus, recorded in Luke 24:13-35. Preoccupied with mourning for their Savior's recent death on the cross, the two didn't recognize Jesus. Yet, they invited him to come home with them:

> *They urged him strongly, "Abide with us, for it is nearly dark; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.* (Luke 24:29)

Henry Francis Lyte took those words, almost verbatim, and turned them into our treasured hymn.[2]

His biographers tell us that Henry took the folded paper with the poetic words to *Abide With Me* and put them into his daughter's hand just before he got onto the boat to leave for Italy. Two weeks later, still on route to Italy, he died in Nice, France, at the age of 54. His beautiful hymn lives on.

If we look more closely at the context of the Bible passage Lyte's used, we'll notice that when the two disciples invited Jesus to "abide" with them, they hadn't yet recognized who he was. They were showing a hospitable spirit toward a *stranger even in their time of grief and loss. What is Henry Lyte trying to tell us through that?*

And then, what did they experience when they brought him home? At the table he introduced them to the Communion experience, the breaking of bread and sharing of wine, as an example of how they would maintain fellowship with him and with each other in the future Church. The climax of the "abiding" experience is expressed in verses 30 to 32 of Luke 24:

Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Holy heartburn!

The same Communion with Jesus will be celebrated at our old ABC location this Sunday at 1:00 PM.

Pastor George Van Alstine

[1] You'll find a short video tribute to Henry Francis Lyte here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kk-Z-dJo8RQ

[2] A few decades after Lyte, German composer Josef Rheinberger put the same text into another beautiful musical form, his motet *Abendlied; listen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIOagJryMik&list=RDsIOagJryMik&start_radio=1*