



Washington Supplement

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Sir Knights—

“If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.” John 15:7

Recently, I had occasion to sing the lyrics of this hymn, Abide With Me, at a Zoom memorial for a dear friend of mine, a Past Eminent Commander of Seattle Commandery No. 2 and an honored member of several other Masonic organizations in which he had held high offices. I was asked by the family to perform this hymn not because I have such a good voice, but because I was a friend of the family and was able and glad to do it. This Sir Knight was a noble gentleman who had served the fraternity for many years in many different positions. He passed away from a combination of cardiopulmonary problems. I cannot surmise that Covid 19 was a factor, but the fact that his passing occurred in the midst of this pandemic gave me pause to reflect on the preciousness of our human existence. His wife of many years chose this hymn as a fitting anthem for the memorial service.

The author of the lyrics was Henry Francis Lyte, a Church of England minister who was the pastor in the small fishing village of Lower Brixham, Devonshire, England. He ministered faithfully to the seafaring folk of this village for over 23 years. But he developed a lung condition which hung over him like a dark cloud. The cold, damp winters of Lower Brixham soon took their toll on Henry and his condition developed into tuberculosis. He preached his last sermon from the village kirk pulpit on September 4, 1847, aged 54. During that sermon he told the congregation that he planned a trip to Italy to see if the pleasant air down there would help prolong his health. In any event, he said “I must put

everything in order before I leave because I have no idea how long I will be away.” Later that afternoon, he took a long walk along the Devonshire coast thinking about his situation. He returned to his room and jotted down the words to this poem, Abide With Me. Some say that some of it had been written earlier in his life and that on that day he refined and supplemented it with his thoughts from that long walk. No matter.

On his way to Italy, he stopped at a hotel in Avignon, France where he revised the lyrics one more time and posted the lyrics to his wife who had remained in Lower Brixham. He arrived in the French Riviera on November 20, 1847 and checked into the Hotel de Angleterra in Nice where later that day his lungs finally gave out and he passed away. Another English clergyman, a Rev. Manning of Chichester attended him during his last hour and heard him say just before he passed: “Peace! Joy!”

Later, at a memorial for Lyte in Brixham, conducted by his son-in-law, also a minister, Lyte’s poem, Abide With Me, was read for the first time. In 1860, William Henry Monk came across the poem and composed the tune, Eventide, to which the lyrics of Abide With Me were married. It was published in 1861 in Monk’s hymnal, Hymns Ancient and Modern.

The lyrics provide a guide for all Sir Knights to take heart when times seem dark and endlessly difficult. I would encourage all Sir Knights to read the lyrics and to think about their meaning.

Commanderies in our jurisdiction are getting by with virtual zoom conclaves in accordance with Grand Encampment General Order No. 12. We long for the day of in-person conclaves, but we will soldier on as long as he abides with us and we take heed of His presence within us.

Yours in Christ,

Sir Knight *Richard M. Kovak*

Right Eminent Grand Commander

Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Washington