

As I write, all the news bulletins on television and all the headlines in the newspapers seem to be featuring problems in the world of football. Where will the World Cup be held? How could the voting possibly cause to be successful a tournament held in a place which is far too hot to play football in and where there are no stadia to accommodate the spectators? Surely mankind has lost all sense of reason as to the important issues in life. Some men appear ready to sell their souls to the god of football. Filled with desire for fame and wealth they run headlong into a chasm of corruption, greed and deceit like the Gadarene swine.

Abide with me

Retired
Members
Corner



However, do not despair. God's ways are past finding out. Before the most important football match in the UK football calendar it is the practice of the sell-out crowd at the huge Wembley Stadium to sing "Abide with me". For many there this is the only time they ever sing a hymn. The Christians in the ground will be praying that the Holy Spirit will use the hymn to awaken lost souls to their need of a Saviour. Due to the importance of the FA Cup final, not only Royalty, but also many top officials in international football are present. Hopefully the hymn will strike a chord and bring light into darkness.

"Abide with me" was written in 1847, just two months before the author, Rev Henry Lyte, died, aged 54. It is said that he felt inspired by the scripture of Luke Chapter 24 describing the encounter that the two on the road to Emmaus had with the risen Lord. Their hearts burned within them as they listened to this stranger, whom they failed to recognise, expound the Word of God covering all the Old Testament. The two disciples didn't want to part company with such a gifted prophet. Occasionally I have listened to a preacher anointed by the Holy Spirit and I could have sat in his company, engrossed, for hours. When the three reached the village (v28) they did not want to part company. "Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent" (v29) was the invitation the two friends extended to the godly wayfarer. He accepted their offer, went in and dined with them. He is prepared to come in and sup with any man who hears Him knocking at the heart's door (Rev 3 v 20); provided they open the door.

When "Abide with me" is sung at Wembley the supporters have come to London from wherever the finalists belong, they have spent much of the day sightseeing in London and now the early evening is coming on at kick-off time. In churches, "Abide with me" is often an evening hymn. The Rev Lyte, however, did not envisage the hymn as referring to the time of day. He saw it in the context of the eventide of life. Perhaps that is how retired CSCU members might also envisage it. The second verse:

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.

becomes even more apt as the years roll on.

Every six months I go to a reunion function with colleagues I worked alongside in various locations throughout Northern Ireland. We usually meet in Cookstown which is about equidistant from Newry, Londonderry, Belfast and Coleraine. At each meeting the numbers reduce. Interspersed with our reunion we have attended funerals. We reminisce about chasing smugglers or discovering poteen stills (we were all either Customs or Excise Officers). We always talk about the past. There are one or two Christians in the company and they are more interested in the future. The Rev Lyte was interested in the future. He sensed he had only a short time left of earthly life:

Keep 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.

We should all be aware that our lifespan is limited. The Lord has a purpose for each of our lives and when that purpose is fulfilled we go to give an account of our exploits as ambassadors of Christ.

The first time I witnessed in public after my conversion was in a football stadium - Windsor Park, 1961. I was in the Billy Graham Crusade choir. We sang:

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

He will abide with you if you've been born again of His Spirit. It could be later than you think. Henry Lyte was 54 when the call came. Be ready for that final journey.