

DEATH SONG

Singing has been on my mind. I miss worshipping in person; I also miss singing together.

- I mentioned in my last sermon how research is warning that, in a pandemic, group singing is considered a high-risk activity, but how we ourselves can still sing in our own homes.
- I received some appreciative emails for that reminder. One member emailed, *"I did not realize my heart and voice had been too long without a song... I made a pledge to sing the praises of my Lord and Savior each and every day... I am once again making a joyful noise unto the Lord."* I love that!



In a pandemic, it's natural for each of us to have times of thinking about the possibility of our own death, whenever that time comes, and may it be a long time from now. Between life and death is a curtain, "the veil," that prevents our ability to gain certain understanding of what lies beyond, making into death what can be an unnerving mystery.

- But you can have a song for that, too!

From beyond the veil, God whispers sweet promises to us, like a loving parent, before we, God's precious children, lay down for that dark and unknown night.

- God the Father, sings to us a bedtime song of love, grace, and salvation.
- God the Holy Spirit kisses our brow with the sign of the cross, sealing us again in the eternal promise.
- God the Son, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, stays by our side all through that night.

How will you meet death when it comes? I am moved by this quote from Mohican Chief Aupumut, born in 1757, and who I understand was also a Christian:

- *"When it comes time to die, be not like those whose hearts are filled with the fear of death, so when their time comes they weep and pray for a little more time to live their lives over again in a different way. **Sing your death song and die like a hero going home.**"*

A death song, according to Chief Aupumut, is a song of courage and home coming. As Christians, we can face death with courage.

- As 2 Timothy 4 says, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness."*
- This is not by works of course, but by grace and the courage of faith.

What words will be on your lips and in your heart as Jesus walks you through the valley of the shadows to the other side?

- Do you have a death song?
- We Christians have many wonderful death songs.
- Choose one and memorize it so that it becomes part of you.

One of our beloved death songs is the old hymn, *“Abide With Me.”*

- The poetry expresses so well both the dying journey and our living hope.
- My brother and sister and I sang it as a trio at our grandfather’s funeral.
- I sometimes sing it as part of my own personal devotions.

“Abide with me; fast falls the eventide; the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.”

- Sometimes death comes quickly but often the darkness deepens slowly.
- Either way, Jesus has your hand and won’t let go.

“When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me.”

- Earthly helpers can only do so much. Eventually, we are all helpless before death.
- That which once comforted no longer will.
- Where do we turn then? We turn to Christ, “Help of the helpless.”

“I need thy presence every passing hour. What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?”

- When we are young, strong, or able, we tend to think of temptations in the form of appetites and forbidden pleasures.
- But on the death bed the temptations change.
- We become tempted by despair, resentment, and hopelessness.
- The Tempter is a master at reshaping temptation to fit your current vulnerability.
- Only God’s grace can foil the tempter’s power.

“Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day; earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away.”

- Even the longest life can seem but a little day.
- The joys and glories of this life ebb out like a receding tide.
- The very world we once knew seems to be dying along with us.
- The unchanging love of God is the one thing we can count on in all of this.

Even at the moment of death we can sing:

“Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory? I triumph still if thou abide with me.”

- Here is your line, Christian, *“I triumph still.”*
- Not I, of course, but Christ in me.
- *“I triumph still because thou abide with me.”*

Christian, when your turn comes, die with the courage of faith.

- Sing with the confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior on your lips.
- Sing the song of Christ in your heart.
- Sing goodbye this life but hello to next one, for God has made you one of his saints.
- “Sing your death song and die like a hero going home.”

Amen.