

DECEMBER

"God's Presence"

by Deacon Steve Arnold

Hymn Suggestion

"Abide with Me" (ELW #629, LSB #878)

Scripture

"In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent. O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come. You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again. You will increase my honor, and comfort me once again." Psalm 71:1-2, 9, 17-18, 20-21

Devotion

Martha is 87 and has lived in a senior care center for five years. She was a farm wife, so while raising 11 children she butchered, planted, cleaned, cooked and baked pies for the church's fall bazaar. She talks of loving her life, but now, she sits. She talks, laughs and can beat anyone at her favorite card game. But now she sits. She says she used to be active but now she cannot even walk. On many days she becomes overwhelmed by loss and wonders whether she has any worth at all.

Henry, 93, was the leading salesperson for his company and traveled extensively. He coached his son's football team. He loved to fish and hunt, and now he sits and stares out the window. His dementia is slowly taking over his body, so he doesn't spend much time engaging in conversation. He sits. He stares out the window.

In Psalm 71, the psalmist cries out for those who are in old age. Paraphrased, the psalmist says on behalf of the elderly, "please don't



forget me." The psalmist then declares, "*You, who have made me see many troubles and calamities, will revive me again*" -- claiming the promise of God to be faithful and present in each step of life's journey.

Thoughtful reflection helps one recall the times God has been present throughout life. It is a helpful prayer practice to spend time at each day's end, looking back, recognizing and celebrating where God has been present that day. As we age, it is helpful to have those around us who can help us recall God's presence throughout our lives. Some days, life has been overwhelming, but support from others helps one see God's faithfulness. To sit and hold the hand of the lonely one brings the assurance of God's love to that person.

God keeps the promise to be present by working through the hands and feet of those who serve the neighbor. Martha, Henry and others are revived through the visits of friends and family, and through the care of the staff. Sometimes the most valuable gift is to sit with someone and say nothing. To be present to someone is -- in itself -- the presence of God.

Any of us can feel overwhelmed by life's issues. There are days we cry out, "God where are you?" and when, through the lives of our senior friends, we can hear the stories of God's faithfulness. We know that we can take refuge in the arms of God who loves us and, through God's own Son, brings us abundant and eternal life. Martha and Henry can know God's love and presence -- and so can we. Thanks be to God.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- Where have I seen the presence of God in my life?
- How might I be the presence of God in the life of another?

Prayer

God of love, you embrace us and comfort us throughout life's journey. Help us to know we have not been forgotten and that you are with us in each moment of life. Grant us the grace and the power to be your hands and feet in service to our neighbors. Amen.

About the Author

Steve Arnold, a Deacon in the Community of Lutheran Deacons within the Lutheran Diaconal Association, is a rostered Deacon of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Steve is an Oblate of the St. John's Abbey Benedictine Community in Collegeville, MN, a retired University professor, and is semi-retired as a Chaplain with Crest View Senior Communities in Columbia Heights, MN.