

Column

I was in a COVID ward this week, thankfully not as a patient, but in my role as a pastor and friend. The 90-plus-year-old I was visiting was by this time on comfort care and unresponsive. Even so, I said the 23rd Psalm, the Lord's Prayer, some other prayers, and with gloved hand marked her forehead with the sign of the cross.

Early on in the COVID crisis no one, including family members and clergy, was allowed in most facilities, and patients were dying alone. Given our understanding of the disease at the time, this stringent measure was probably prudent from a clinical standpoint, yet still sad from a human one. Thankfully, a more **holistic** approach has **re-emerged** in recent months.

In the case of the patient I have just mentioned, the staff of the facility (Union County Nursing Home) had placed a 'boom box' beside her bed and had her favourite music playing softly. This is good medicine.

Still, dying without someone holding your hand and telling you they love you is not what most of us would want. As I left her room, the words I had just repeated came to mind: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for *thou* art with me." Despite appearances, she was not alone.

In the New Testament, Jesus gives us an even more robust promise: "*I* will come again, and receive you unto myself" (John 14:3). Jesus was the unseen visitor in that room. He Himself was holding her hand ready to take her home, surely a most comforting and exhilarating thought.

Songwriter Thomas Ramsey turns this thought into verse when he says:

"When I come to the river at the ending of day / When the last winds of sorrow have blown / There'll be somebody waiting to show me the way / I won't have to cross Jordan alone."

In the stanza that follows he gives the reason for this hope and assurance: "Jesus died all my sins to atone / In the darkness I see / He'll be waiting for me / I won't have to cross Jordan alone."

Wherever we go, whatever our circumstance, in life and in death, there is Someone beside us to cheer and guide us. Never alone, no never alone! This is the conviction that propels the follower of Jesus out of bed each morning and gives meaning and purpose to life. Seize this hope, make it your own – today.

O LORD, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in thy mercy grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer).

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