

Abide with Me Communion Meditation

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I was privileged to serve as a Division of Overseas (now Global Ministries) missionary in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) from 1989 to 1991. I worked at the Bolenge Hospital with mothers and children in a feeding program. I packed my backpack every morning with perseverance and headed down the jungle path to the hospital. I appreciated being able to simply abide with the mothers and children.

It was an overwhelming situation with so much poverty, heat, political upheaval and human need there on the Equator. But I focused on the people right in front of me. When there was a death, people would scream and tear their clothing. The funeral wakes lasted all night. The next morning, however, they would be back working in their gardens or fishing the Zaire/Congo River. In September 1991, the Zairean dictator, Mobutu, did not pay his army and the country erupted in violence as soldiers looted and pillaged in major cities. Belgian paratroopers evacuated all foreigners from Zaire. Along with my six Disciple missionary colleagues, we flew to the capital of the French Congo, Brazzaville, where we abided the day. That night, we flew to Washington, DC. I was grateful to have my backpack with a change of clothes, photos, passport and some perseverance.

In 1992, I started Clinical Pastoral Education at the University of Arizona Medical Center after completing deputation. There were many patients who would scream and yell. I was called to abide with them. I was reminded of Woody Allen's saying, "90% of life is just showing up." So as a young CPE intern, I just showed up. I abided with people in distress just as I had done in Zaire/Congo. I continued CPE at the Presbyterian Hospital in Oklahoma City with my backpack full of perseverance. More abiding.

Now it is 27 years and three health-care systems later with chaplaincy certification under my belt. For all these years, John 15:5 has nurtured my call to be a missionary, a pastor and a chaplain. "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit." As we gather now to abide, we commune in community for communion. Let's all remember the perseverance we have as Christ's followers in our backpacks. Thanks be to God.

Rev. Booker-Hirsch's ministry as both a Global Ministries mission co-worker and as a hospital chaplain, endorsed by Disciples Home Missions, is supported by your gifts to the Easter offering.