

God, hold us, enfold us, through desolate loss

Marjorie Dobson (1940 -)

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Our friends were looking forward to their wedding anniversary. They had been married for many years and had known each other since she was fourteen. He had been in hospital having some treatment for his heart condition. That had worked effectively, and the hospital doctors were willing to discharge him so that they could spend their anniversary day together. Unfortunately, he took more than a gift and a card home.

They spent a happy anniversary celebration in each other's company, but he became ill again and she had to watch him being loaded into an ambulance without being able to go with him, or even to kiss him goodbye. Soon she was ill with the coronavirus that he had brought from the hospital and he died without their ever meeting again.

Only four people attended the funeral and she could not hug, or be hugged, by any of them. They were not even allowed to shake hands. Now she visits his grave alone and waits for the day when all the family can visit it together. She is thankful she had to care for her little dog: the only company she had and the only reason she felt the need to keep going. Just one tragic story among many but made personal by the fact that we knew them both and how devoted they were to each other. So, we can feel and see her pain. So many other people are also waiting to be held by someone who cares and can offer real comfort.

When I wrote the words, 'God, hold us, enfold us, through desolate loss', I was thinking of another friend whose bereavement story was equally tragic and how the instinct to hold someone who is sorrowing is built into many of us. Does it stem from the days when, as children, we ran to a parent to be hugged when something went wrong, and we were hurt or afraid? But how can any of us do that if we must stay at least a metre apart?

We can't, but God can!

Yet it is not always easy to remember that when it seems that 'living is pointless, a meaningless maze' and 'raging and tears,' 'anguish and doubt' and 'remorse and fears' dominate everything else. We need to be reminded gently that God understands our pain, because 'the shock and the anger, the hopeless despair, are echoes of Calvary.' And God 'meets us there.' Also, that instinct to reach out to our grief-stricken friends is God given because 'they hold us for you (God) while the tide of grief turns.'

The constant refrain of 'God, hold us, enfold us' wraps around the whole hymn and, hopefully, offers some comfort that our grief is held in the arms of God until 'one step at a time (God) will help us to move to face new horizons.'

At the time of writing this our widowed friend is still waiting for the comfort of her family, as are so many others. Until then, we can be 'the friends who can share ... sorrow and pain

with compassionate care,' in order to hold and enfold those tragically bereaved people in God's love.

God, hold us, enfold us, through desolate loss.
The sign of your love is your own empty cross.
The shock and the anger, the hopeless despair
are echoes of Calvary. God, meet us there!

God, hold us, enfold us, through long empty days,
when living is pointless, a meaningless maze.
We need you to listen to raging and tears,
to anguish and doubt, to remorse and to fears.

God, hold us, enfold us, by friends who can share
our sorrow and pain with compassionate care.
By their words, you speak out your loving concerns.
They hold us for you, while the tide of grief turns.

God, hold us, enfold us, till weeping has passed;
when flickering hope parts the shadows at last.
One step at a time you will help us to move
to face new horizons, held safe in your love.

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And a prayer for those we know who have suffered in this way – and for those who are complete strangers to us.

God will be with you in the desolation of your days.
God will be with you in the darkest of your nights.
God will be with you in hopelessness and despair.
God will be with you in fear and anger.
God will be with you when all reason has gone.
God will be with you to love and to cherish you
until you are ready to face life again.
God will be with you.