

Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 10, 2009
St. Timothy Lutheran Church
Grand Island, NY
John 15:1-8
I John 4:7-21

“Abide”
by
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In typical concise, familiar imagery, Jesus, using the analogy of the vine and the branches, the stem and the shoots, the trunk and the branches, states the premise:

“I am the vine. You are the branches.” (John 15:5)

Then he commands:

Abide in me as I abide in you! (v.4)

Bear much fruit! (v. 5)

Abide and bear fruit!

Abide

For me, an image of “abide” is that wonderful modern invention called Velcro. With offsetting texture, two pieces adhere to each other. The connection is quite instant and strong. “Abide in me!” Attach yourself to me firmly...and remain. Abide! Like the branch grafted into the vine, be nurtured and grow, grow and bear fruit.

When I think of this life-giving bonding, I cannot help but think of the relationship of mother to child. So much of a child’s sustenance, at least early on, comes from its mother. There is no substitute. Have it and thrive. Be deprived of it and wither.

It is no wonder that mothers hold a unique place in our lives. There is, most often, a bond that defies description. I see it especially when I observe the grieving and sense of loss that many experience when their mother dies. It is quite a remarkable thing; truly worthy of honoring this day.

Jesus said: “Abide in me!” Like a child to its mother, abide in me!

Bear fruit

A fruit tree is planted with the intention that it one day bears fruit. It remains a tree if it does not bear fruit, but its purpose is not fulfilled if it does not bear fruit. A fruit tree is supposed to bear fruit. The purpose of “abiding” is so that something comes from it. Abiding is not an end in and of itself.

Jesus said: “My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.” (v. 8)

Many Christians mistakenly assume that “being saved” (even by grace) is all that is essential to being a Christian. No, we are saved for a purpose. The purpose is to bear fruit for God.

The fruit that we are to bear is not just any “fruit.” A pear tree is to bear pears. A peach tree is to bear peaches. An apple tree is to bear apples. A branch grafted into Christ is to bear Christ. To bear Christ is to bear the fruits of Christ; namely the work of restoring all things unto God and to ushering in fullness of life.

Christians are called to “abide” in Christ so as to become instruments of God’s work in the world He loves.

The First Letter of John, chapter 4 gives us a good commentary on the subject of “abiding” in Christ and bearing fruit. The writer, John, works from the assumption of a fixed relationship with Christ (the abiding in him) and from the assumption that doing so inevitably results in something. This something is fruit. The fruit of this relationship he asserts is “love.”

Then John proceeds to tell us is that Jesus, as the vine, the source of our being, does three things:

1. He motivates.

Verse 11 “Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.”

Verse 19 “We love because he first loved us.”

Our motivation for bearing the fruit of love is God’s prior love. The motivation is not first and foremost a “should” or “ought.” It is a grateful response to God’s own love offered freely and without strings attached.

He motivates.

2. He guides.

Verse 13 “By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us his Spirit.”

He gives us his Spirit. That means that the spirit of the Father and of resurrected Christ breaks into the here and now, influencing, guiding, and empowering our daily action. The empowerment to love and to do the works of God comes from the Holy Spirit within us. The Spirit surrounds our every move.

He guides.

3. He sets the standard for “love.”

(Listen carefully, now. This is the key to this whole section on love.)

Verse 10 “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

In this is love. The standard is Christ’s love.

The standard is not just any kind of love.

Like: I love pizza.

I love your hair do.

I love the Bills.

It is not “love ya!”

It is this love: the love that Christ does as the “atoning sacrifice” for our sins. It is the self-giving, self-sacrificing love that redeems and restores, that rescues and recovers. It is the self-giving love that deals with the consequences of our sin, the brokenness in our lives, the fractured-ness of our world. It is love that buys back and gives life.

That is to be the standard of our love.

He sets the standard.

It is important to remember and to understand that God’s grand mission in the world is to redeem and to restore his whole creation...to bring it to fullness of life. It is to rescue and to recover that which is lost.

Now, if that is his mission, it is important to remember and to understand also that his method to accomplish that is to use people. People are his instruments. People are his heart and his hands. People are the means through which he will accomplish his purpose, his mission.

People doing that are “bearing fruit.” That is the kind of “fruit” Jesus is alluding to when he says: “Abide in me and bear much fruit!”

It is not surprising, then, that the letter writer indicates that there will be “signs” of abiding in this kind of love.

Verse 15 “God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God.”

A sign of “abiding” in Christ is that a person will publicly name the name of Jesus. They will give witness to his love and saving work.

Verse 18 “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.”

The absence of profound fear is a sign of “abiding” in Christ’s love. When all else fails, there is God. When others fail you, there is God. Ultimately, with Christ in your life, what is there to fear?

Verse 21 “The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”

A sign that a person abides in Christ is that they love their brothers and sisters. They love them into greater wholeness. They love like Jesus, selflessly. It is, as John says in verse 17 “as he is, so are we in this world.”

On this Sunday when in America we honor mothers, it would be well if we honor all who love in Christ-like ways. Regardless of gender, it is the nurturers who bear fruit in the lives others that we should lift up and celebrate. There is no more noble aspiration than to wish to birth and to nurture another in Christ. To all you mothers who have done that, we honor you in Christ’s name. To all of you who do that as fathers, as surrogate mothers, as friends to the young, we honor you.

[PRAYER]