

May 6, 2018 • Sixth Sunday of Easter • Holy Communion

“Abide in Love”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris



Most sermons here are based on the biblical passages assigned for the day through what is called the lectionary, the three-year repeating cycle of readings. The passages assigned for the Sundays of Easter are fascinating—all chosen to help us unpack the meanings of resurrection. What does it mean for us now to follow and serve our risen Lord? If he’s no longer “here on earth,” as he was, where is he? Who is he to us who are still living here? What is our new relationship with him to be like?

The first disciples had those questions, I’m sure. And my hunch is that we do, too. Always wanting to understand more about just how who he is changes us and shapes our lives.

So—two weeks ago, the Good Shepherd who is the king of love. Christ who is with us, always, who guides us, shelters us, lifts us, protects us, loves us. Last week the vine. “I am the vine, you are the branches,” he had said. The vine, its roots planted in heaven and its branches sheltering life on earth, the source of life from which we bear fruit in our love for one another and in bringing others to faith.

John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

“Abide in my love,” Jesus says. “Abide” in my love. “Abide” is such a beautiful word, an old-timey word, we might say, which in fact comes from Old English roots. It means to remain, stay, dwell, lodge, continue, endure. It’s found throughout Scripture, often translated as remain and stay and so forth. Psalm 119: Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abides. John 14: In my Father’s house are many abiding-places. I Corinthians: Now faith, hope, and love abide, and the greatest of these is love.

The whole Gospel of John is very much about abiding. At the very beginning of his Gospel, John wrote that in Jesus, God comes to abide with us. The Word became flesh and lived among us. God with us. God present with us here in this life. God abiding with us.

So now, after the resurrection, just where does Jesus abide? And how does that help us understand where we are to abide?

In the first chapter, John writes of an intriguing exchange between Jesus and his disciples all about who’s abiding where. After John the Baptist had baptized Jesus, he was standing with a couple of his disciples. They see Jesus pass by and John exclaims: “Here is the Lamb of God!” John’s disciples hear John say this and leave to follow Jesus. Jesus sees them and turns to ask: “What are you looking for?” And they respond with another question. “Rabbi, teacher”, they call him, “where are you abiding?” And Jesus says to them: “Come and see.”

Always the good teacher, Jesus engages them, asking: “what are you looking for?”, “what are you after?” He seems to know intuitively that their hearts were hungry, that they were wanting something more for their lives. That in asking where he abides, they were also asking where they should abide.

And then he invites them to “come and see.” “Follow me.” He invites them to abide with him that they might understand for themselves what is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Come, walk with me. Talk with me. Learn from me. Pray with me. Abide with me.

Abiding, they will come to understand, is about being present to the presence of God in our midst wherever and everywhere we are. It’s about learning to trust that first, God loves us each and all. That no one is beyond the reach of God’s love. God creates us in love, nurtures us in love, walks our daily path with us in love. And so we are to learn to abide in a loving relationship with God or as Bishop Ruben Job has written: to stay in love with God.

To abide in God, to abide in God's love, means to keep ourselves in close relationship with God. To talk with God in prayer. To praise God in worship. To serve God in service to God's people, need to pay attention, to devote time and energy to our relationship with God.

As we abide with Christ, we develop a spiritual depth that grounds us in God's love and peace. The theologian Eberhard Arnold wrote in the 1930s, these words no less true today: "the great agitation in the world of today makes it more and more urgent to gain inner strength in those quiet encounters with Christ that make it possible for us to remain [abide.. in him]. Situated as we are in a world that is so terribly unpeaceful, we need constant nourishment for our inner life...our inner being needs daily the quiet haven of communion with God."

As Jesus invites his disciples to abide in him, he's inviting us into a lifetime of learning, practicing living in love. Sometimes failing. Sometimes getting it right. Always moving further along the way. Remaining, staying, continuing on.

For by God's grace, "love abides." That is, God gives us time. God slowly crafts us into the people we are created to be, learning to be steadfast and faithful, drawing us into God's own love, slowly and patiently, molding us into those who, by abiding in that love, come to know a love stronger and more steadfast than comes naturally to any of us. The God of love is the God who creates us for love, who redeems us through love, who sustains us by love, who sends us out to serve others in the power of love. The love that knows no limits, no boundaries, no color lines, no in-group/out-group. The love that draws the circle wide and never ends

The love that abides.

This morning, we celebrate that timeless and limitless trajectory of God's abiding love as we gather at this table in a few moments and participate in the sacrament of holy communion, the sacrament that binds us to Jesus and to the church in every time and place. The deep bond of love between God and God's people, known through Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit, abiding across generations past and yet to come.

In this love we abide, now and forever and ever.

Amen

Notes:

Dwight M. Pratt "International Standard Bible Encyclopedia". 1915.

Gilbert Meilaender. "Love abides: The posture of faithfulness." The Christian Century, October 11, 2000.

William Brosend. "Abiding Love." The Christian Century, May 17, 2000

Eberhard Arnold: Innerland: A Guide into the Heart of the Gospel. Plough Publishing House reprint, 1999.

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