

“Family Values”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Season of Eastertide, Sunday, May 3, 2015
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Holy Scriptures: John 15: 4, 7, 8 and 1 John 4: 7-21

John 15: 4, 7, 8

⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

1 John 4: 7-21

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 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. ¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the

world. ¹⁵ God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶ So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

²⁰ Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. ²¹ The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Abide.

Abide is an old fashioned word.

Abiding originates in the grace of God.

Abiding is a word, a way of life, and a value system

that has been handed down to us from generation to generation.

Jesus said, *“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.”* – John 15: 7

First John proclaims: *“God is love, and those who abide in*

*love abide in God,
and God abides in them.” --1 John 4: 16b*

Abide...

Abide in Jesus...

Abide in Jesus, and He in thee.

Abide in God, who is love;

those who abide in God are to love one another.

Abide is not a word we tend to use in everyday conversation.

At the end of an inning of Atlanta Braves baseball,

the late, great Skip Carey, beloved play-by-play
announcer, never said,

*“One hit, one walk, no runs scored, and two left abiding on
base.”*

A few years ago on a very late night,

as my family drove home from a trip to Pittsburgh
and the General Assembly of the Christian
Church,

we found ourselves on the loop
around the perimeter of
Lexington, Kentucky.

We drove in a big circle around the city,

cranky and tired of searching for a motel with a
vacancy sign.

We finally saw blinking lights that read, “Stay here! Stay
here!”

The sign did not read, “Abide with us tonight! Abide with us
tonight!”

Abide as a word seems to belong to another time.

To abide has to do with persevering, continuing, lasting,
staying with it.

Spiritual abiding is about dwelling, resting, remaining connected to the Spirit.

No wonder the term is rare.

What abide means may appear to be rare, distant, hard to attain and maintain.

Do you sense an absence of abiding?

Whenever spiritual abiding in Christ and one another is absent,

we feel less than we can or should be, as if we are somehow diminished.

When spiritual abiding is absent

we witness friendships break off, communities crumble, mistrust thriving.

Treaties between nations grow tenuous.

Business contracts become tissue thin.

Someone who feels powerless or frustrated may pick up a brick rather than a ballot.

A neighbor who is disconnected from his or her neighbors

may lash out via social media on line,

rather than seek to find commonality through Jesus “on vine.”

The Good Lord knows the river of tears and dysfunction

set in motion by the absence of abiding in committed relationships,

one of the foundations of human community.

In Martin Buber’s groundbreaking tome

he defined healthy, abiding, loving relationships as I-Thou.

Spiritual abiding is at the center of a value system

that celebrates and embodies I-Thou relationships.

However, when we choose to objectify people by their functions

or what they can do for us

or to see people as “others” or “different” or as
“less than,”
we fall into the trap of seeing humanity
through a lens of “I-It.”

*“Rather than truly making ourselves completely available
to them,
understanding them, sharing totally with them, really
talking with them,
we observe them or keep part of ourselves
outside the moment of relationship.
We do so either to protect our vulnerabilities
or to get them to respond in some preconceived way,
to get something from them.
Martin Buber calls such an interaction I-It.
It is possible, notes Buber, to place ourselves completely into
a relationship,
to truly understand and “be there” with another person,
without masks, pretenses, even without words.
Such a moment of relating is called “I-Thou.”
Each person comes to such a relationship without
preconditions.
The bond thus created enlarges each person,
and each person responds by trying to enhance the other
person.
The result is true dialogue, true sharing.” [1]*

Let us call this abiding.
We name and claim and proclaim this love incarnate.

Abide...an old-fashioned word, comes to us from the days of
yore.
The Holy Scriptures dig into the essence of life and love and
relationships.
“God is love,

*and those who abide in love abide in God,
and God abides in them.” --1 John 4: 16b*

This morning's Scripture from the Gospel of John
takes us to the night of Jesus' betrayal.
Surrounding him are the 12 disciples who would, each one,
falter in their efforts to abide with Jesus in his
greatest hour of need.

When Jesus speaks to his disciples,
one would think that the word abide would seem to be
the last word

he would risk on Judas, Peter, James, John and
the rest.

Yet this is the very language Jesus chose to use at the Last
Supper.

Jesus began his Upper Room discourse
with the picturesque image of the vine and the
branches.

*“I am the vine, you are the branches.
Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit,
because apart from me you can do nothing.” – John 15: 5*

This talk of a vine and branches is a special reference to
Israel,

the people of God who so often struggled and wrestled
with how to be fruitful branches that grow from
the vine.

The disciples would struggle as well.

Jesus loved them through it all.

All of God's love and resources were at their disposal,
ready and available for their daily walk with Christ.

Are we any different?

Do you feel the love of Christ?

The more attached we are to the vine, to the love of God,

the more we can tap into the mighty resources of God,
all of which are at your disposal.

Do you sense the presence of God loving you through your
struggles?

Throughout your joys and challenges?

When you are in the midst of adversity,
trust that God abides, that the Spirit is nigh,
helping you to find meaning in adversity,
to learn something valuable from it
and to bounce back.

As a reminder that we are not inviting God into our story
but that God invites us into God's story,
regardless of our personal circumstances
we are called / commissioned /
commanded

to look around and really see and
love one another.

So, is there someone that God needs for you
to love them through their own ups and downs,
challenges and triumphs?

I wonder if when we love one another,
when we love those whom God sends our way,
when we love the ones God sends us out to
serve,

could this be what it means to bear
much fruit?

Abide.

Abiding is a core value of whose and who we are.

“How do people learn the nature of love?”

How do people learn how to love?

*[Some Christians] would probably answer these questions
in psychological terms,*

*appealing to the family as the primary setting
in which life is experienced, modeled, nurtured...
Other Christians might address the questions by looking at
the larger society
as the crucible in which attitudes toward love
are shaped and lessons learned.*

*[Today's lessons from the Holy Bible offer neither a
psychological nor a social answer.
In First John] the answer is quite clear:
Love comes from God.*

*The writer of the Odes of Solomon puts it this way:
'For I should not have known how to love the Lord,
If [God] had not continuously loved me.' "* [2]

We experience God's love in the incarnation of Jesus.
God's gift of Jesus is to teach us the meaning and depth of
God's love for Creation.

We, who are created in the image of God, Imago Dei,
are to reciprocate God's love for us
by loving one another.

This love, this abiding, connecting, empowering love,
comes from God and is passed on from one generation
to the next.

Not too long ago an rookie ballplayer in the Braves minor
league farm system

hit an infield ground ball.

He slowly jogged toward first base where he knew he would
be thrown out.

After he trudged back to the dugout, the coach pulled him
aside and said,

"Bobby doesn't play that."

In other words, Bobby Cox, who was then the manager of the Major League Braves,

insisted his players hustle on every play.

If you want to wear a Braves uniform, then play every day with passion and hustle.

George Brett is in the Hall of Fame with 3,154 hits.

When asked about his wish for his last at bat, George Brett said,

“I hope I hit a weak ground ball to second so everyone will see how I hustle to first.”

Once upon a time someone taught young George how to play the game.

Some showed him the value of how to never quit on a play or his team or the game or in life;

how to never give up or give in or give out;

how to embody the gifts he had for the game and his neighbor.

Family values are handed down and handed out and handled with care,

whether in a baseball farm system,

in a downtown church in Atlanta or a rural congregation in Aba, Nigeria;

whether in a family of 19 Duggers

or a single soul who makes a world of difference.

Family values may be defined as “the moral and ethical principles

traditionally upheld and transmitted

within a family, as honesty, loyalty,

industry, and faith.” [3]

Family values are passed on from generation to generation within families,

within Christian Churches and faith communities
of all shapes and sizes, creeds and contexts.

Compromise, reason and civility are family values.

Compassion, mercy, and service above self are family values.

Hate is not a family value.

Greed is not a family value.

Senseless violence is not a family value.

Family values are grounded in abiding in God and abiding in
one another.

Retired basketball player Dikembe Mutombo had a
resurgence of fame
based on his TV commercials in which he swats away
people's tosses

toward wastebaskets and shopping carts.

He wags his long fingers and says, *"No, no, no! Not in my
house!"*

When asked about his upbringing and what he held dear,

Dikembe Mutombo said,

*"I come from a large family, but I was not raised with a
fortune.*

Something more was left me, and that was family values."

Our greatest inheritance is a core of family values that guide
us to abide.

Hopefully, prayerfully, faithfully we glean and then pass on

from one generation to the next

the best of ourselves and our practices.

Do you ever wonder where God is calling you to journey to
make a connection,
 experience a revelation,
 recognize a new form,
 dream a new dream?

How far is God asking you to go?

Do you need to begin a journey of a thousand miles with a
first step?

 Or go on a journey of one yard to see the person next
to you?

 Or to traverse the one-foot-journey from head
to heart?

Abide.

Abiding is a stretch.

Recently at one of our church and community festivals
 a young father asked me about this church's mission.

After discussing our various ministries of grace and
community service,

 I shared that we seek to incarnate the love of God
 while reflecting the diversity of Decatur.

He looked around the festival at the veritable United Nations
 playing and working together, and he said, "*That is a
good idea!*"

Yes, we will claim it and name it and follow this good idea,
this good theology,

 only the truth is it isn't ours.

God thought of this first.

Abiding is an old word, and an even older way of being.

We began to abide from before we were born.

Jesus had this idea that we abide in him,

 connected like a vine, wherever he plants us.

Jesus prayed that we might be one, as He and God are one.

May we love one another in God's diverse and amazing
world.

May we abide together, ever connected with the Holy Spirit,

for such a time as this.

It is going to take some effort, some stretching of our Selves.

Abiding takes a bit of practice.

Each time we celebrate Holy Communion

we are practicing for the Great Banquet

where all the people of the world find hope and

home

in the presence of God and one another.

A Christian friend named Yushi Nomura shared in church that he had a dream.

He dreamed he went to hell and then he went to heaven.

When he awoke he told his family of his dream.

They asked Yushi, "What was hell like?"

"Oh, in hell you are seated at a huge table with all the best foods you can imagine.

Everyone must eat with chopsticks that are three feet long.

As a matter of fact, the chopsticks are so long that by the time

you bring a morsel of food to your mouth, it falls off.

So even though you are in the midst of plenty, you are eternally hungry."

"My goodness," said his family. "What is heaven like?"

"Oh, in heaven you are seated at a huge table with all the best foods you can imagine.

Everyone must eat with chopsticks that are three feet long."

They exclaimed, "But that means heaven is just like hell!"

Yushi smiled and said, *"The difference is that in heaven, they feed one another."*

Abide.

Abide is an old fashioned word.

Abide is a word as fresh as today and as promising as tomorrow's dawn.

All power to the Creator, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Call to Communion

One day Jesus of Nazareth gathered his followers in the Upper Room for what would be their last supper together. Jesus prepared his followers for what was to become of him as well as what was to become of them. Jesus shared with the disciples about being prepared to follow the way of God. Disciples of Christ must choose this path, this journey, in our own way. Each follower of God is reminded that everyone is to choose the Way of God, a choice we make daily, confident in the loving, ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit.

[1] Jewish Virtual Library, essay on Martin Buber (1878-1965), [I-Thou](#).

[2] [Texts for Preaching: Year B](#), By: Brueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa, Newsome. 1993.

Page 312-313.

[3] [Dictionary.com](#).