

*“Abide in Me”*

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, GA

Season of Eastertide, Sunday, May 6, 2018

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Holy Scriptures: John 15: 9-17; 1 John 4: 13-16; 5: 1-6

John 15: 9-17

<sup>9</sup> As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

<sup>12</sup> “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

1 John 4: 13-16; 5: 1-6

<sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <sup>16</sup> 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.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. <sup>3</sup> For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, <sup>4</sup> for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? <sup>6</sup> This is the one who came by

water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

### Sermon

#### *Abide in Me.*

Abide is an old word.

Abiding originates in the Way of God, as sacred as grace, as time-tested as love.

The Holy Scriptures speak of abiding

as the Word of God digs 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)

The late Fred Craddock, who would be 90 this week,

understandably calls abide "the central verb" in the passage,

and emphasizes its importance in the entire Gospel of John.

Eugene Peterson translates "abide" a little differently:

*"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you."* (The Message).

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."*

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

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

Just as we need the air to breathe,

we need food and nourishment to live.

We need shelter and community; we need a home.

The early Christians, who had in a very real sense

lost their spiritual homes and perhaps, along with them,

their family ties and physical homes,

were undoubtedly comforted by this thought. (Kathryn Matthews

Huey)

People watch to see how the church loves one another,

loves the stranger, loves the community,

and then decides whether to trust the church based on such criteria.

*"Those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."*

We hear that word, "love," often in John's writings.

Love is at the heart of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Love is the measure of faithfulness.

For John, "The mark of the faithful community is how it loves, not who are its members." (Gail O'Day)

Love feels like a state of being,

so the word "abide" almost jumps off the page in these Bible passages.

(Kathryn Matthews Huey)

This kind of love is intensely personal and greatly communal.

Love connects us with God on a very personal level

and connects us with God's people in community.

The New York Times reported that a public library had been defaced with graffiti.

Apparently, a boy had taken it upon himself to decorate an outside wall with chalk.

He drew a huge heart and wrote inside his masterpiece, "*Billy Mayer loves everybody.*"

***Abide in Me, said Jesus.***

Be grounded in me.

Be guided by me.

Let us explore together abiding as a personal grounding in God,  
and then as a communal guiding force of God.

Abiding gets to the core of who and whose we are.

The Bible teaches us, our hearts inspire us, our minds inform us  
that love comes from God.

God is Love.

We are God's own.

We are loved, and we are to love God, love yourself, love one another.

*"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]

Jesus said, "As [God] has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.  
<sup>10</sup> *If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love,  
just as I have kept my Creator's commandments and abide in God's love.*  
<sup>11</sup> *I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you,  
and that your joy may be complete.*  
<sup>12</sup> *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."*

This morning's Scripture from the Gospel of John  
takes us to the night of Jesus' betrayal.  
We find Him in the Upper Room.  
Surrounding him are the disciples who would, each one,  
falter in their efforts to abide with Jesus in his greatest hour of need.  
One would think that the word abide would seem to be the last word  
Jesus would risk on Judas, Peter, James, John and all 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.  
We struggle, too. We falter and fail and stumble.  
Jesus loved them through it all.  
Jesus loves us through it all, as well.  
Jesus called the disciples then and today to abide in Him.

***Abide in Me.***

Do you find comfort in the thought and feeling that Christ abides with you? in you?

That the presence of God is always with you, no matter what or when or where?

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

Throughout your joys and challenges, moments of doubt and faith?

When you are amid 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.

*"Abide in me,"* is what Jesus said in his last discourse to his followers.

*"My words abide in you. ... This is my commandment,*

*that you love one another as I have loved you."*

Christ abides in you.

This is Good News, indeed.

God dwells richly in you, in your soul, in your being, in your life.

Christ who abides in you invites you to acknowledge His presence,

and to return the favor, the joy, the gratitude by loving one another.

Abide in Christ, who is love;

those who abide in God are commanded to love one another.

"I think therefore I am? Nonsense!" said William Sloan Coffin. "I love, therefore I am."

We who are grounded, who dwell in the love of Christ are commanded to love one another. Abiding becomes a calling, to dwell where God sends us, where God is already and calls for our help, our resources, our very selves.

Do you ever sense in your relationships or community an absence of abiding?

Whenever spiritual abiding in Christ and one another is absent,

we feel less than, as if we are somehow diminished.

When spiritual abiding is absent,

friendships are more fragile, cities crumble, mistrust thrives.

Those who feel powerless or frustrated

may pick up a brick rather than a ballot,

may lash out via social media on line,

may prefer to be right than reconciled.

*Abide in Me.*

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.  
[Buber notes it is possible] 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]

Jesus called this abiding.  
We name and claim and proclaim this as God's love incarnate...in us.  
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 whomever God sends us out to serve  
could this be what it means to bear much fruit?

Do you ever wonder where God is calling you to journey to make a connection,  
to experience a revelation, recognize a new form, dream a new dream?  
Where is God asking you to go, guiding you to go, calling you to abide with  
God?  
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 in Me.***

Abiding is a stretch.

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

Abiding takes practice and prayer and perseverance.

Dr. Fred Craddock told a story of his encounter with Albert Schweitzer.

Schweitzer wrote a book called, The Quest for the Historical Jesus, which,

according to Craddock, was woefully lacking in its understanding of Jesus Christ

and God's saving work in the world.

Schweitzer was scheduled to offer an organ concert in Cleveland, Ohio.

Craddock bought a bus ticket to go and hear him play.

Fred worked up a series of stunning, piercing questions to throw at Schweitzer, to call into question his understanding of Jesus.

He wrote them down on a legal pad.

He planned to corner him after the concert and engage him in a serious discussion. After the concert was over,

Schweitzer came into the Fellowship Hall to visit with people.

He was white haired, with a bushy mustache, stooped over, 75 years old.

He was a master organist, a medical doctor, a philosopher, writer, missionary in Africa, and a Biblical scholar.

He addressed the audience in the Fellowship Hall.

*"You've been very warm and hospitable to me,"* said Albert Schweitzer.

*"I thank you for it, and wish I could stay longer among you, but I must go back to Africa.*

*I must go because my people are poor and diseased and hungry and dying, and I have to go. We have a medical station at Lambarene.*

*If there's anyone here in this room who has the love of Jesus, would you be prompted by that love to go with me and help me?"*

Craddock looked down at his legal pad full of questions, and suddenly he felt that they looked stupid.

Later, reflecting on that night in Cleveland, he said,

*"And I learned again what it means to be a Christian and had hopes that I could be that someday."*

***Abide in Me***

Abide is a sacred word, grounding us in today, guiding us into tomorrow.

*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 Jesus Christ choose this path, this journey, each of us in our own way as well as together, in community. 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.

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[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.