

Abide in Me

John 15:1-8

May 2, 2021

Jesus was incredibly good at telling the extraordinary and eternal truth with ordinary and daily languages. Using ordinary things and daily activities, such as baking bread, fishing, sowing, drinking, he taught us about how God works and what God wills.

This morning we hear him teaching the truth, mentioning about the vine and its branches. Palestine was the land of vineyards. The vines were all over. So his disciples had no difficulty in following Jesus' talking and teaching. "I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." (vs 5)

If Jesus were here to teach us in the 21st century, he might say this way: "I am the wi-fi and you are its users. Those who are connected with me have life, because apart from me you can do nothing." We got his message, as well. No wi-fi connection, no life. No Jesus, no life. Isn't it?

The word, "Abide" is the most crucial word to pay attention. It is repeated 10 times in those first 8 verses of the 15th chapter of John. It was a crucial word in Jesus' faith vocabulary. So let's look at it and see its meaning in our lives.

What does it mean to abide in Christ? To abide in Christ means realizing his presence. How do we abide in Christ? We abide in Christ by realizing his presence in us and with us. Eugen Peterson translates this way: "4"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you." Imagine you make your home in the Lord and live with him just as the Lord makes his home in you and live with you. Isn't it beautiful and wonderful?

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How can we make our home in the Lord just as he makes his home in us?

First of all, through prayers. We live with him through prayers. Praying is a precious gift God has given to all of us, for we are able to connect and be connected to God.

“How do you know Jesus who died on the cross has risen again? One Sunday school boy asked one of the devoted and faithful and mature senior members. She said, “I know he is risen, for I met him this morning.” She, of course, mentioned about her morning prayer time.

Praying is communicating with God. It is a surest way to connect and be connected to God, the Spirit.

Praying is ACTS. Acronym ACTS. A, Adoration, C, Confession, T, Thanksgiving and S, Supplication. Adoration. During praying, we do praise God the Creator, the Provider and the Sustainer who cares about the world and all the living in it. Confession: We pray for God’s forgiving our sins as we forgive those who sins against us. Thanksgiving: We count all the blessings daily and give thanks to God when we pray. Supplication: We cast all our problems, conflicts and burdens to the Lord and ask God’s help and deliverance.

The last S stands two Ss: Supplication and Silence. After you make supplications, you listen to God. It is like meeting with a medical doctor. What do we do after we explain all the pains during the visit? Yes, the doctor talks and we listen. Likewise, we talk and then listen in silence when we pray. In silence, God not only talks to us but heals our brokenness, comforts us, restores us and embrace us. In silence, we are reminded over and over that we are loved by God all the time now and forever.”

“Pastor, I do pray but nothing seems to happen. I do not feel anything. I hear people singing, “And he walks with me and talks with me.” I do not see the Lord talking and walking with me.” I understand that. It is common. And that is the reason I talk about making real Christ’s presence, because the presence of Christ in our life is not natural really. It is not something that happens automatically. It is something that we make happen by what we do as God’s children. That is why we do “ACTS.” Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication and Silence every day.

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There is another way for us to make real the presence of the Lord or realize God’s abiding presence in us and with us: **That is through scripture.**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” Hebrews 4:12 “Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” The Bible, inspired by God is the Word of God, living and active.

There is one thing that I am greatly thankful for these days since last April. That is reading the COD and sharing the VOD together daily. COD – chapter of the day. VOD – verse of the day. It has been a wonderful way to connect not only with one another as sisters and brothers in the Lord but with the Lord.

Have you heard “Lectio Divina”? It is a traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading and meditation intended to promote communion with God and to increase the knowledge of God’s word. In this practice, scripture is not treated as texts to be studied or analyzed, but as the living word of God to receive and meditate.

We have been reading and meditating by reading the Book of Psalm since January, this year. “In my distress I cry to the Lord, that he may answer me.” (Psalm 120:1) The living word of God comforts us and confirm our faith. “Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain. Turn my eyes from looking at vanities, give me life in your ways.” (Psalm 119:36-37) The Word of God, living and active, directs us and transforms us to the way of the Lord. “The Lord will keep your going out and coming in from this time on and forevermore.” (Psalm 113:3) The Word of God encourages and empowers and enlivens us.

I heard this story sometimes ago. There were three brothers who gathered in the living room after their mother’s funeral service. They discussed who would get their mother’s remaining things. Let me have her diamond ring. Go ahead, Sam. Let me have her tea table. Go ahead, Tom. No arguing until they decided over one item. “No way, it is mine. I am the first son.” “No, it belongs to me. Please let me have it.” “Please brothers, let me have it. I make sure it goes down from generation to generation.” Do you what item they tried to claim as theirs? You are right. That is their mother’s bible. There are her personal notes here and there next to verses. She underlined some verses here and there throughout the bible. Where is your Bible?

Too busy to pray? Too busy to meditate the Word of God? Too busy not to pray. Too busy not to meditate the Word of God, for we can do nothing apart from him the vine.

Someone describes what it looks like abiding in the Lord this way. When you put a tea bag in a cup of hot water, something amazing happens to that water. As the tea bag remains, or "abides" in that water, it begins to color that water and flavor that water, until that water begins to take on the color and the taste of the tea. Now the longer the bag abides in the water, the stronger the color and the taste of the tea. That is exactly what happens when you abide in Christ and He abides in you. The longer you abide in Christ and the deeper you go with Christ, the more the influence of Jesus Christ will pervade your life, so that you begin to reflect His nature and His character.

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I would like to introduce one more way to realize the presence of the Lord who abides in us. That is paying attention to our relationship with others who also abide in Christ. God has blessed us with our family members and friends and our church family members and friends. And God is at work in our relationship with one another.

Last Sunday right after the worship service at the nursery school lobby, Marge talked to me straightforwardly. "Why not?" As you might recall, I shared how much I have been wrestling over this unexpected appointment to serve Asbury UMC in Bristol, CT. "Why me, Lord? Why now, Lord? Why there, Lord?" God answered me through Marge, "Why not, Kun Sam?" "Why not me? Why not now? Why not there?" Wow. I heard the Lord speaking through Marge.

The presence of the risen Lord is here and now in our midst as we love one another and care for one another and serve one another as God loves us, cares for us and serves us.

It was Wednesday the day before the Thanksgiving Day around noon time. I went to Panera Bread on Black Rock Turnpike for lunch. Yes, I went to my second office for lunch. As I approached with a cup of soup to my table, I saw a woman having lunch alone. So I say, "Good afternoon!" and ask what her plan would be for the Thanksgiving. She said there would be no family thanksgiving

dinner due to Covid-19 pandemic. Right away, I asked, “Do you like me to deliver thanksgiving dinner boxes? I am a pastor at Fairfield Grace. We are going to deliver dinner boxes to people tomorrow. “I love to.” Cynthia welcomed my offer. “Tomorrow around 5 pm I bring you a thanksgiving dinner boxes for you.” “Can I have two? For me and my husband?” “Surely”

Making a long story short, I asked her to come to the church and pick up the dinner boxes due to more than 10 deliveries to do within one hour. And she did. Since then, we have been meeting occasionally and now she has been worshipping with us. Hallelujah! By God’s grace, she and I have been connected. By God’s grace, we have been making real the presence of the Lord.

In closing, Jesus says in verse 11.

“I am the vine and you are the branches. Abide in me as I abide in you.” 11I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

I pray for you and myself this morning:

May the joy of the Lord fill us and our life as we abide in the Lord through praying ACTS, meditating Scripture and cherishing relationship with family, friends and even strangers. In the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The congregation says, “Amen.”