

5 Easter Year B

5/2/2021

Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:24-30; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

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In our collect today we prayed these words:

Almighty God... grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life...

We pray that we will know Jesus Christ... perfectly know Jesus...

To be the way, the truth and the life.

And that we may follow his steps...

And our readings today talk about just how to do this.

How to follow in the steps of Jesus.

Let's start with the Gospel.

It is one of the seven *I am* statements of Jesus.

All found in the Gospel of John.

Jesus says:

I am the true vine

Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches...

And the only way we can produce fruit in our lives is by abiding in the vine.

In fact, Jesus says there is no other way.

He says:

Those who dwell in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.

Well, there's this little word that keeps coming up in our reading.

In fact, in our gospel reading it appears 8 times.

That's the word *abide*.

It's not a word that we use a lot in conversation.

The word means:

to remain stable, to continue, to conform

Jesus uses the word to describe how we produce fruit...

He says:

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.

So, the key to following Jesus...

to follow his steps like we prayed in our collect...

is abiding in him.

We are to keep in step with Jesus.

In a sense, we are to *keep on keeping on...* in Jesus.

Be persistent, be faithful, continue, remain...

Abide in the vine.

St. Paul does not use the word abide as much but coined a different way of saying the same thing.

It's the prepositional phrase *in Christ*.

Some scholars suggest that it is the primary description of what it means to be a Christian in the Scriptures... we are in Christ.

We are abiding in Christ.

In our Thursday night study... ABC...

C. S. Lewis wrote about this saying:

*When [Christians] speak of being ‘in Christ’ or of Christ being ‘in them’, this is not simply a way of saying that they are thinking about Christ or copying Him. They mean that Christ is actually operating through them; that the whole mass of Christians are the physical organism through which Christ acts – that we are His fingers and muscles, the cells of His body.*¹

¹ CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 63-64.

When we are in Christ...

When we are abiding in the vine of Jesus...

We are not merely trying to copy what Jesus did...

We are actually joined with Christ...

We are a part of a new creation...

We are experiencing the joys of the victory of Jesus on the cross...

And living in the resurrected life of Jesus.

We are in him... and he is in us.

Jesus said:

Abide in me as I abide in you.

In our second reading today... we have more about what it means to abide in Jesus...

To be *in him*.

In St. John's first letter...

He goes back again to this word *abide*.

He uses the word 6 times in our reading from his epistle.

And he gives three ways of how we are to abide and remain in Christ.

First, he writes:

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

So, abiding in Jesus has to do with His Spirit... the Holy Spirit.

What marks us as Christians...

is the fact that the Spirit of God dwells within us.

To abide with Christ means the Holy Spirit is with us...

The Holy Spirit is the mark and seal of our salvation.

In baptism, we are marked as Christ's own forever...

The Spirit comes into our life and begins to transform us...

continuing a call to become more like Christ.

As Christians we ask the Holy Spirit to continually fill us so that we overcome our weaknesses in life and find power to preach the Gospel in word and deed.

When we abide in Christ the Spirit produces fruit in our lives...

The fruit of the Spirit... love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness...
(Galatians 5) ...

we don't produce the fruit...

we yield to the Holy Spirit who is producing the fruit in our lives.

We pray come Holy Spirit and fill us up so that we remain abiding in the vine of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So first we abide in Christ by the Spirit being in us:

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

Now **secondly**, St. John writes:

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

The Son of God is not a title indicating a relationship between a human father and son.

God the Father did not produce God the Son...

like some form of Greek or Roman mythology.

Jesus is God's Son in the sense that He is God made manifest in human form (John 1).

This is a confessional statement... a belief that we proclaim.

Jesus was God in the flesh.

The Holy Incarnation.

And when we confess and believe that...

it brings consequences.

Because if Jesus is God...

the one true God...

What does that mean for us?

It means we should listen and obey his words.

It means we should follow his actions and commands.

And that means we no longer live for ourselves or whatever it is that we live for... and live for God and his kingdom.

This is what drove St. Paul... as he travelled around the Roman Empire proclaiming the gospel of Jesus.

He wrote in his letter to the Philippians:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (1:21)

He confessed that his life was no longer his own...

but belonged to the Lord Jesus.

To confess that Jesus is the Son of God... is to declare the glory of God.

To confess that Jesus is the Son of God... is to live into the person of Jesus Christ... it is to abide in Him.

So, the second way we abide in Jesus is to confess Jesus as the Son of God:

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

And finally, **third**... St. John wrote:

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

Christians who are abiding with Christ...

who “keep on keeping on” with Jesus... emanate love... *agape* love...

a self-sacrificing love...

a giving-up-of-one’s-self kind of love.

If we abide in God...

love should be very evident in our lives.

Turning to C.S. Lewis again... He writes of God’s love in this way:

...the Christian thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him. He does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us

And then he gives this example:

...just as the roof of a greenhouse does not attract the sun because it is bright, but becomes bright because the sun shines on it.²

If we are abiding in Christ... love will pour out of our lives.

If we are not showing forth love...

perhaps we are abiding in something else...

² Ibid., 63.

St. John and Jesus are pretty straight forward with this too.

St. John says:

Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars...

Jesus says:

Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Those are tough words...

A bit scary even.

But the point remains... those who abide in Christ display God's love.

Love should be evident in the people who abide in Christ...

who abide in the vine.

Jesus said in the Gospel of John (13:35):

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

And this is not just a feeling kind of love...

It is a doing kind of love.

A sacrificial love that is defined by the life of our Lord Jesus.

As St. John wrote in our second reading from today:

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10).

That is the atonement for our sins...

The satisfaction for our sins.

You see...

Love is laying your life down for others...

as Christ did on the cross.

And if we abide in Jesus...

love for others should be evident.

So, the third way we abide in Jesus is by allowing Christ love to flow through us and out of us toward the people around us...
to all of his creation.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

So, today we are called to abide in the vine...

To be in Christ...

To live through Jesus.

And our readings have given us three ways we abide in Christ:

First, the Holy Spirit is in us and ministering through us.

Second, we confess that Jesus is the Son of God to the world around us.

Third, sacrificial love flows from us more and more each new day.

Friends, may we abide in Christ.

Now and for the rest of our days.

Amen.