

## May 02, 2021, The 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter: John 15:1–8

*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. (v4)*

The word “abide” occurs 4 times in this one verse, and 4 more times in the next verses. Jesus wants us to see something important. A dictionary defines “abide” as: *to stand fast, to remain, to go on being*; older usages including the ideas of *to await; to submit to*. I think all of this is operating in Jesus’ use of the word, but I think there is something even deeper. I would add that abide, as we generally use the word, also includes the idea of someone, something remaining significantly present in one’s life, consciously or unconsciously, affecting our character, thoughts and actions in significantly unique ways.” When a person “abides” with you it means that without him/her in your life, you would be a different person.

So much abides with us, and often this abiding is not altogether conscious, but no less powerfully life-defining. As an example, I am and always will be from Michigan; Geri, our children and grandchildren, my university and seminary, every parish I have served, every job I have ever held, will always abide in me, making me who I am at this moment, for better or worse.

Jesus’ desire and promise are to abide in us and we in him. One’s life is significantly, uniquely different in Jesus. Jesus brings in the images of vines and branches, fruit and pruning. While Jesus did indeed come to bridge the gap separating vulnerable humanity from God, he will not transport us out of human experience into some utopia. To abide in Jesus, and he in us, means Jesus will act in and through us. Jesus abides in us not so we may escape the pain and struggle of life but so through him we may give his life to others. To abide in Jesus, and he in us, is to participate in the creative and loving activity of God in bringing repentance and healing to the world. We are enabled to take up Jesus’ mission through “abiding:” a continual growing towards deeper oneness with Jesus.

When “one’d” to Jesus we produce “fruit,” which is the life we give to others. Surprisingly, it is not just Jesus who gives life: it is Jesus in the Father, the Father in Jesus; it is you and me in Jesus, Jesus in us. This is what we have to offer: Jesus in us and we in him, colored by one’s own peculiar gifts, personal experiences, individual environments; shared by all as each is called. Therefore, we are fellow workers in God’s life-giving yearning for all. We give the life of God to each other and receive this life from one another. We abide in Jesus and Jesus in us; in him we are “one’d” to God’s divine Being and “one’d” with all who serve Christ. How do we abide in Jesus? Here is some traditional Christian wisdom for everyday practice.

- Center your life in Christ continually and continuously. This may include repeatedly offering a short prayer, such as Psalm 70:1: *God, make speed to save me; Lord, make haste to help me*; or just, *Lord, help!* It may include the tireless recitation of the Jesus Prayer, repetition of a meaningful Bible verse, or times of silence or prayerfully gazing at a cross or icon. The important thing is to gently and continually center your conscious mind on Christ.
- Pattern your actions on Christ’s example and the Church’s teaching. Periodically examine your life using the 10 Commandments or Beatitudes; review the Prayer Book Catechism; review the Baptismal Liturgy. Memorize and strive to live those passages that portray the Christian ideal, such as Galatians 5:22-23 *The fruit of the Spirit is love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*
- Offer your will to God so that the Holy Spirit may strengthen and guide you: Always include in your prayers the phrase, “Not my will but your will be done in me today, Lord Jesus Christ.”
- Expect change in yourself and others: (Philippians 3:13b-14) *Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.* Despite temptations for apathy, cynicism, and doubt, God is faithful; change is inevitable if we abide in Jesus.
- Gratitude, gratitude, gratitude, gratitude, and gratitude: *Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice* (Philippians 4:4). To abide is to know and live a joy-filled life in Christ. We each will always face great challenges in life. To practice gratitude, especially in the face of obstacle, fear, and doubt, is an overt act of abiding in Jesus, who is our strength and hope. There are many other ways to abide; open your heart and Jesus will teach you and will abide with you always.

Blessed and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, for ever and ever. Amen.