

Abiding Love

John 15:4-17

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. ⁵ 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.

⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 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. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

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

Theme Statement

Abiding in Jesus makes it possible for love to grow and be shared among us. But what does “abiding in Jesus” mean?

Exploring the Word

John 15:4-17 is at the center of what is called Jesus' farewell discourse to his disciples (John 14-17). What did Jesus tell them that would make it possible for them to endure the tumultuous times ahead? Their legacy from him was the gift of peace (14:27). Moreover, they were one with him just as a vine and branches are one (15:5). God's gift of eternal life had been given them (17:3). The disciples' unity with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit has made all this possible.

John 15:4-9 Abiding in Jesus

Jesus announced an imperative for his disciples just as arrest, torture, and death were about to descend. They were to *meno*—the Greek word for “live in” or “abide with”—Jesus. Not only that, they were to abide in him with extravagant joy. How could they do this? As a vine and its branches are organically and intimately one, so were this rabbi and his students. It's fascinating to note that there is no hierarchy of branches. One branch doesn't have a better title and a higher seat at the table than another. What is important is that they all bear beautiful, joy-giving fruit.

This proclamation about abiding together meant that the disciples would have to . . . change. This was another new model for them. No seat was to be saved for them at Jesus'

right or left (Matthew 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-40). Theirs was to be a communion of hearts and minds. Furthermore, Jesus wanted them to remember that a farmer trims the yellowed leaves and withered branches from a vine so they won't impede the growth of the life-sustaining grapes. Pruning is necessary, but it isn't fun for the pruner or the "prunee." Bearing the fruit of love and service is the point of living in Christ. If we become withering branches, we will be pruned and changed for our sake and for the good of all.

John 15:10-11 The purpose

What is it like to live that way, abiding or living in Christ? "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete" (v. 11). "My joy" and "your joy" are intertwined. Artistic renderings of Jesus most often depict a profoundly serious, tragic Jesus. Bible readings of what he said and did are presented with great solemnity. But here in verse 11 we discover that abiding or living in Jesus means abiding in his joy. Holy hilarity, some call it. It's not merely happiness but a deep, never-fading joy.

John 15:12-17 Jesus' friends

The powerful and grace-filled words of friendship and love in these verses are surrounded by the imperative to bear fruit. They begin in verse 12 with the commandment "Love one another," even to the extreme of dying for one another. They end with "Go and bear fruit . . . so that you may love one another" (vv. 16-17).

The root for the vine and branches is nurtured in the rich soil of God's love for us all and in Jesus' command to love one another. Love leads us to joyfully bear "much fruit" (vv. 5, 8).

The Word Today

Veterans Day is remembered this week. It is 102 years since the end of World War I, and seventy-five years since World War II was over. My dad was on the small Pacific island of Iwo Jima when peace was announced on August 15, 1945. He'd been there since the battle between US and Japanese forces in February and March of that year, when more than 25,000 US and Japanese soldiers died. My dad wasn't one of them, though he came oh so close to being killed. He bore the ugly scars of Iwo Jima the rest of his life.

Why was Dad there? His civilian job as a welder protected him from being drafted. Why then did he sign up? He did it for newborn me and my mom, for his four brothers who were already serving, and for the millions of people around the world who were suffering under hideous dictators. Dad was willing to lay down his life for all of us. He served with his whole heart and joyfully returned to us. He didn't talk about the war until fifty years had passed. Then he talked and talked. He had done his part. He had survived. He would never forget the ugliness.

Jesus knew that laying down his life for his friends could take, would take, the form of a horrible execution. And he knew the ultimate joy born out of his astounding willingness to die. He rose with the joy of new life, and so did we.

Dad knew the joy of living with and abiding in Christ, no matter what. "Thank you, thank you, thank you, Lord Jesus," he would call out with every one of his prayers. I add, "Thank you, Dad."

Questions for Discussion

Beginnings

1. Who are your friends now? The kids you grew up with and went to school and/or college with? Your neighbors? Church buddies? Your sister or brother? Do you have a “bestie,” a best friend?

Exploring the Word

1. Which of the several possible translations of the Greek word *meno* would you choose if you were translating the text of John 15:4-10?

abide	stay	accept
live	remain	other: _____
tolerate	endure	
bear	keep	

Why did you choose that word?

2. Which of the verses about abiding, from this session’s Bible text, are more important? Rank the following verses, with 1 being most important and 5 being least.
___ “Abide in me as I abide in you.” (v. 4a)
___ “Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.” (v. 5)
___ “Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers.” (v. 6a)
___ “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” (v. 7)
___ “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.” (v. 10a)

3. John 15:11 is said to be the purpose statement for the fourteen verses that are the focus of this session. Do you agree? Or would you suggest another statement as the purpose statement?
4. What is going on in verses 12-17, where Jesus said he no longer called his disciples slaves (or servants), but that he now called them friends? What would be the difference for the disciples in the days and years ahead?

The Word Today

1. Think of people whom you definitively consider “not friends.” What would help you move someone on that “not friends” list to someone who is a friend? Check all that apply.
___ They would need to apologize for hurting my feelings.
___ I would need to forgive them even if they didn’t ask me to.
___ I would have to walk a mile in their shoes.
___ Someone who is not a friend must amend their ways.
___ I would be changed upon remembering God’s great love for them.
2. Like a branch entwined with the other branches that cling to Jesus, our vine, circle the fruits you want to bear.
deep compassion radical generosity
unadulterated joy patience
acceptance agape love
sacrificial service tolerance
authentic worship peace
availability the ability to listen
a “thick skin” gentleness

Closing Prayer

You welcome us to make our home in you, just as you have made your home in us. Our entwined lives bring us joy and yield fruitful service for our friends in this world. Thank you, thank you, thank you, Lord Jesus! Amen.

Further Study

John 20:19-23; 1 Corinthians 12

Daily Readings

M. Isaiah 5:1-7

F. John 15:18-25

T. Isaiah 27:2-6

S. John 15:1-3

W. John 14:8-14

S. John 15:4-17

T. John 10:11-18

Memorization

John 15:11

[Jesus said,] "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."