

**May 6, 2018**

**6th Sunday of Easter**

**John 15:9-17 (Year B)**

**Lutheran Church of Our Father, Greensboro, NC**

So I have a bit of a confession to make: On Monday or Tuesday of this week when I looked up what today's text would be, I pulled it up and read through it and my first thought was "Abide?... Again?! Didn't we just abide last week? Do I really have to abide two weeks in a row?"

Of course the irony is obvious. Abiding isn't something that we do one Sunday and then check the box and move on. We don't abide for just a day or so. Abiding is an ongoing thing. It's a constant, a state of being.

Last week I described abiding as resting ourselves in Christ, resting our lives in Christ. It's a verb, but not a verb like running or jumping. It's not as active as that. It's dwelling. It's intentionally existing in Christ. And so, necessarily it's a continuous action. The very nature of abiding is that its ongoing. We don't just abide for one Sunday, and then stop and move on to whatever the next Sunday is about. We continue to abide. And so it's probably a good thing that this week we are still talking about what this sort of abiding looks like.

Last week Jesus told us to abide in him as he abides in us. And so we talked about what it means to rest our lives in Christ, to have Christ as our companion – Christ as the guiding song for the way we live.

But today's message is subtly different. Today Jesus says to abide in his love. He says: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love. And this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." Jesus is raising the stakes. It's not just enough to just abide in Christ. Abiding in Christ necessarily means that we abide in Christ's love, which means that we love one another, as Christ has loved us. Which at times is easy... and others, not so much. With some people it's easy... and others, not so much. But the reality of abiding is that it's a constant. We can't just abide some of the time – when we feel like it, or when its easy, or when it's with people that we really like. If it is Christ's love that we are abiding in, then it has to be for all people. We either are abiding in it or we aren't.

And so Christ's call to abide in his love – Christ's call to love one another as he has loved – is an "in all times and all places" call. It's rejoicing with one another in times of joy. It's grieving with one another in times of sorrow. It's caring for one another in times of difficulty. This is the call of community in Christ. Abiding in Christ's love means abiding in love with one another. Which pushes beyond just familiarity. It goes further than just being a community of people who recognize each other, and maybe know a thing or two about one another. To truly abide in love for one another, we have to know what's going on with people. We have to be invested in them, to care about them, and not just in abstraction, but in literal, tangible, specific ways.

It's the reason why we begin our worship by lifting up joys, cares, and concerns. We announce birthdays so that we can be joined in celebrating the gift of each other's life. We announce prayer requests so that we might uphold one another in our hearts and our prayer. And while this is great and helpful in keeping us tied in with one another, I can't help but feel like really *abiding* in love for one another ought to be even more personal than that. And so the more I thought about this idea of abiding in Christ's love, the more I felt like what would be better than a long sermon on it, is time to just lean into it. And so I want to try something kind of weird today.

Instead of me preaching for another six or seven minutes, we're going to let our proclamation take a different form. And we're going to take a few minutes to gather into small groups of three or four and chat. Just right where you're sitting, you probably won't even need to get up. But sort of shift and turn and maybe slide and gather into a group of three or four. And when we're in these groups, we just want to take a few minutes to really be present with one another. Maybe you know the people in your group well. Maybe you've never talked to them before. But either way, the idea here is to just give your group an opportunity to

understand a little bit about what's going on in your life in this moment, so that they can love you where you are, and be present with you in this moment of your life, and bear witness to Christ's love.

So what we'll do is get in these little groups, and then I'd like each person to share either the best thing from this past week (what the "high" of your week was), or the worst thing about this past week (the "low" for the week), or a place where you saw or felt God at work in your life or in the world, or one thing that the others in your group can be praying for for you? (And if you look on the back of your bulletins at the bottom I've got those questions printed for you.)

You may have time to share more than one thing, but I really want to make sure everyone gets a chance to share something, so start by making sure everyone gets a chance to speak to one of those questions. And we'll use this time together to abide in love, and dwell in the moment with each other, and celebrate, or grieve, or pray with each other, and to experience Christ's love in one another.

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Hopefully everyone's had a chance to share something. And I just want to say thanks, for going along with this. I know it's maybe a little weird, and it requires us to be a little vulnerable with each other. and it's certainly not the form we are used to our proclamation taking. And yet I am sure that in the words that you spoke to one another, and the way that you heard one another, Christ is truly present.

But, my last thing I want to add, is that the key to this exercise is not only what we've just done, but what we do. Because now that we've spent some time abiding with one another, we don't just check the box and move onto whatever the topic is next week. Abiding is ongoing, it's constant. And so we use these conversations to help us grow deeper in love for each other. We continue to rejoice in the things we lifted up, or grieve the things we lifted up; to look for God in each other's lives and to lift up and pray for one another. Not just right now. Not just today. But ongoing.

So maybe next week, check back in with someone from your group, and see what new things might be going on in their life; what new places they might need prayers as you continue abide together in Christ's love. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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