

“Abiding in Jesus”
by Rev. Frances Savill
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John 15:1-8

Easter, Holy Week, those days weren't that long ago. We remembered our Lord's suffering, death and glorious resurrection.

Our passage this morning happens as Jesus is preparing his disciples for his death.

The disciples are going to find themselves in the situation we're in, Jesus will no longer be visibly with them. Jesus has told them not to let their hearts be troubled or afraid, that through the Holy Spirit he will continue to guide them.

At the end of the chapter and beginning chapter 16, Jesus will tell them about persecutions they will face. The disciples are between a rock and a hard place, so to speak. Their Master Jesus is going to leave them behind, and they are going to be rejected by their peers. Yet in all this, they are not being abandoned by their Lord.

Jesus assures them that his leaving them is in fact a good thing and they should share his joy that he is going to the Father. And the Holy Spirit, the Advocate would empower them in new ways. Jesus' important word to them, in these crucial last hours of his life, is around abiding in him.

Eugene Peterson in *The Message* captures the meaning of Jesus' words well:

“Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me.

⁵⁻⁸“I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing. Anyone who separates

from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples.

John Calvin said:

"We are by nature barren and dry, except in so far as we have been engrafted into Christ, and draw from him a power which is new, and which does not proceed from ourselves."

So what do you think of Jesus' words? Apart from me you can do nothing! Or in Peterson's translation, "Separated from me, you can't do a thing." Do you believe that separated from Jesus you can't do anything?

The danger is that we look like we're doing many things. We can be busy; busy with life, busy with family, with work, even busy with church stuff, but if we aren't abiding in Christ, if we're not obeying him, making our home in him, we will do nothing of substance.

The church has the same issue. We can run programs, look busy, successful even, but if everything is not rooted and grounded in Jesus and his word, nothing will be accomplished for God's glory. The church will only bear fruit, inasmuch as we are obedient to Jesus and abide deeply in Him.

Our lives will only have meaning in as much as we make our home in Jesus, and are being obedient to him. One day we're going to come before Jesus and be held accountable for our days, the life we have lived, what we did with the gifts entrusted to us, the time we had, and what are we going to say?

Jesus' instruction to his disciples as he is preparing them for this death is: "Abide in me, and I in you. Apart from me you can do nothing, but abide in me, and you will bear much fruit."

"Abiding", making our home in Jesus, is a continually renewed action of the will. It will not be something automatic. We must deliberately return again and again, each day and each moment of the day, to this one true starting point.

Many of you may have read The Good and Beautiful God; falling in love with the God Jesus knows.

This book at the end of each chapter has spiritual practises it recommends as a kind of soul training. One of the chapters encourages the reader to recite Psalm 23 at the end of the day and first thing in the morning daily.

This is not a rushed, 30 seconds before your feet hit the floor, but a meditation on each of the words, letting the images and the love of God wash over you, before the busyness of the day presses in. And it encourages you to pray the Psalm as often as you can throughout the day, pray it so much that it becomes second nature to you, as natural as breathing.

I found this a most excellent exercise. Some of you have the book on your shelves, I'd encourage you to look at it again. I found this exercise most helpful in returning to the love of God, abiding in the presence of God, throughout the day, and choosing again and again, moment by moment to dwell in God, and learn obedience to him.

Leslie Newbigin in his excellent commentary on John's Gospel talks about Jesus' abiding in his Father. Jesus himself said that **he** could do nothing apart from the Father. But Jesus lived his life abiding in his Father's love, this abiding was expressed in his obedience.

Newbigin says:

"Jesus had no program of his own. He planned no career for himself. He sought no "identity" for himself, no "image." He simply responded in loving obedience to the will of his Father as it was presented to him in all the accidents, contingencies, and interruptions of daily life, among all the personal and public ambitions and fears and jealousies of that little province

of the Roman Empire in the time of Herod and Pontius Pilate. Only thus did Jesus "abide" in the love of the Father. So the disciple will "abide" in the love of Jesus by following him along exactly the same road. A disciple of Jesus will not be concerned to create a character or a career for himself. He will leave that to the wise pruning of the Gardener who alone knows what pruning, what watering and feeding, what sunshine or rain, warmth or cold is needed to produce the fruit he desires. The disciple will "learn obedience" by following Jesus in the same kind of moment by moment obedience to the will of the Father as it is disclosed in the contingent happenings of daily life in the place and time where God has put him." (The Light that has come p.200)

Simply put, we fix our eyes on Jesus, we seek His kingdom first, and in all the places we find ourselves today, in all the situations of life, family, work, school, God prunes us, pulls up weeds, digs up the soil of our souls, and as we learn to follow Jesus' lead, respond in obedience in the dailyness of life, then we will bear fruit, and we will be recognized as Jesus' disciples. We will look like Jesus.

And this fruit we will produce, grapes, wine, the fruit of the vine, is celebrated in the psalms as that which "gladdens the heart."

The wine Jesus shared with his disciples that same night as he told them to abide in him, was a foretaste of the wine of the heavenly banquet, and "the blood of the new covenant poured out for many."

Jesus is the true vine, God is the Gardener the one who tends and works over, and cares for, and prunes the branches.

As we have the life of the vine in us, as we abide deeply, learning to obey and be as the vine, we will bear much fruit, and we will be recognized as disciples of Jesus.

Thanks be to God!