

John 15:1-8
Abiding
June 26th, 2016

Today we are again talking about “Rest”. This is the 2nd of 3 sermons on rest. The subject of rest may not seem necessary in a Church made up primarily of retirees, but remember last week, how many, said they were busier now than before they retired? If we were good at resting, abiding with Jesus, I think I would avoid the subject; but alas, we are not.

And resting is vitally important to our physical as well as spiritual and emotional lives. It is also vital to our church life. In the church we need periods of rest to keep working for the Lord and so to practice what is preached we are resting in July. All our committees and many groups will be taking July off to rest up for the events of August and this fall.

Rest is so vital it is built into the rhythm of the universe.



It is built into the rhythm of our bodies and daily lives. Rest is so critical that if we don't get enough of it we will get sick both of body, soul and mind. In the scriptures rest is forever hallowed in the concept of **Sabbath in the Old Testament and “abiding with Jesus” in the New.**

In fact, in Hebrew the word for “Sabbath” means “rest”. And as I have said the idea for a Sabbath rest goes all the way back to creation. God built into us a rhythm of “rest” and then “work”.

God created everything including human beings, and then instead of sending us right out to work, God called us to rest. On the 7th day God and all of Creation rested and then on the 8th day the work began. It was our job to tend the garden and take care of the animals. It is from

the rest, the renewal that comes from abiding with Jesus, that we gather the physical, the emotional and spiritual strength to do God's work.

Our intern Alex, when we were talking about this concept, pointed out that if we rest before we work as God did than God must have been resting before he made creation.



The Sabbath or rest is one of the Ten Commandments. Just think, not resting is as bad as lying, stealing, adultery and even murder. The thought is that if you rest, if you take your Sabbath to be renewed and reconnected with God, then these other sins do not enter your life to destroy you and others. To rest is also to acknowledge we are not our own gods. It is not by our own hands and hard work we succeed; it is by the providence of God.

Now from the words of Jesus read today, it is very apparent that God wants us, not to just rest, but the rest has the purpose of making us ready to work.

Jesus, in fact, in verse 2 says, “He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.”

The fruit is “works of love.”

We are made to work out of our rest, not rest from our work, and the problem is we often work too hard. We don't rest enough; abide enough with Jesus to know what we should be doing. Works in the sense of this scripture are “works of love.” But works include what we do for a living and for recreation. The truth of the matter is that for

many, our lives are too stuffed with things we do rather than abiding with one another and with Jesus.



So many I have talked to recently have lives so stuffed with activities that there is no time for rest, no time for thought, no time for God and acts of love. They stumble exhausted from one event to another.

If there is anything I could say to some of you today and pray you could hear it is “give it a rest!” You are a human being; not a human doing and you should just **“Be” with God and others for awhile**. You should just abide.

In the last year I have spent a lot of time abiding with my mom and my dad. Most of you know that in 2015 my mom broke her right hip on her 91st birthday. After meetings and worship and other events at church I went to simply abide with her, be with her. At first she didn’t make much sense because of the pain meds; but with a change in meds we could sit with one another and talk. Lately, she has been sharing with me the story of her family. My mom is a total extrovert.

My dad is such an introvert; just me being in the apartment with him is enough. It gives him peace. Father’s Day after I got home from Annual Conference and my own celebration with my son-in-law I simply sat in a chair next to him for about 30 minutes and occasionally he would speak. Next week I will address how introverts and extroverts abide differently.



In the hospital and hospice rooms I have been in over the lifetime of my pastoral career, I have seen and experienced a lot of abiding with

those in pain and those dying. I have seen loved ones spending sleepless uncomfortable nights in awkward chairs to be near loved ones who are unconscious or unaware of their presence and it makes me think of God. I think of God and our relationship with him.

We, often at our best, on our best days and even in our best worship services, are probably as unaware of the Loving Presence of God as dementia patients are unaware of their loved ones who sit quietly in their rooms. This loving presence, that is God, is more aware of us than we will ever be aware of him. As 1 Cor. 13:12 says, **“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”**

What comfort to know that God fully knows us! God sits and watches over us like a concerned mother over a sick child through the hours of the night. I think of a retired general I knew sitting with his wife who was dying of Alzheimer’s, day after day for more than a year. She did not know he was there.

We even at our best are as unaware and out of touch with God, but still Jesus calls us to abide with him. In all our human frailties, in all our deafness and blindness to God’s presence, we are called to still try to see and hear and understand. How do we do this? How do we abide?

That word “abide” appears eight times in these verses. But how do we do this? How do we stay connected to the vine that is the source of life and power to work?

Verse 7 gives us 3 clues, **“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”**

First, know Jesus’ words. Know the Bible. As verse 7 says, **“If you abide in me and my words abide in you,..”** We need to know the teachings of Jesus. We need to know his words and his works. Do you wait for God in the Scriptures? Do you rest with the words of God and

the stories of the Bible on your mind? They explain life. They guide life. They help us abide.

Second, pray, “ask for whatever you wish,..” This is definitely prayer. Take your petitions and requests to God in prayer. Abide with Him. In God’s presence think of the things that face you, that scare you, that hold great possibility. Abide with Jesus with the thoughts of your heart and mind.

Third, to abide with Jesus is often to be very active. It can be doing the “works of love” He has given you to do. When we ask in the name of Jesus, in the nature of Jesus, God will respond, **“And it will be done for you.”** These are the works we do out of our rest. Some of the most deeply powerful spiritual experiences you can, and will ever have, will be ministering to another human being in the name of Jesus and knowing in your heart of hearts that God made you for that very moment.

Know that “resting with Jesus, abiding with Jesus” is never being lazy. It is never a call to laziness but refreshment. Verse 2 makes that very plain. God has a plan and a purpose for each of us and we need to find it and use the talents God has given us. **God removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.** We are to be fruitful. We rest; we abide to be made ready to work.

Finally, abiding with Jesus means to make a continual commitment to Him as Savior and Lord.

I would say 99% of the people here have made that commitment at least once, but Jesus here enjoins us to do it again and again and again.

Verse 8 seems so out of place when you think that it was first spoken to his close disciples. **My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.** Weren’t they already Jesus’ disciples? Yes, so what was Jesus saying? Well the connotation in the

Greek is that of continual recommitment to show that you are a disciple of Jesus. The only way that is seen by anyone else is through works of love.

To abide with Jesus you need to make a commitment to Jesus again and again. That is one reason why, when I bring in new members, I ask us all to join in the vows. Each time we do it, in some way, we are drawn closer and closer to God.

I want to close with this thought. To make a commitment or recommitment to God is called “repentance”. It means to turn from sin towards God. It means to drop something out of your life in order to put something new there that is of God.

In this metaphor of God as the vinegrower, Jesus the vine and we the branches, it speaks of pruning. I want you to think of that in terms of your lives. God wants us to bear fruit, works of love. But our lives are so full that if we were to add another thing it seems our whole life would collapse. Jesus here is saying don't be afraid to prune. Don't be afraid to cut something out of your life that is good but not the best.

A vineyardist from New York said this about pruning the buds on grape vines: *Grapes produce three buds each spring. They are called the Primary, Secondary and Tertiary buds (buds 1, 2, and 3).*



Here's a cross-section of the three. It looks scary or like one of the star nebula.

The vine grower will skillfully prune off the secondary and the tertiary buds so that the primary bud will receive all of the goodness the vine can carry to it.

This makes for sweeter, bigger grapes. One thing that struck me as I learned about this art of growing grapes is that the things that are pruned in the spring are not bad, evil or ungrape. The 2nd and the 3rd buds would have born grapes—not oranges or worse, asparagus. They would have yielded grapes. But vine growers, to ensure the best grapes, put the focus of the vine into the primary bud.” Pastor Bill a UM from NY

It's the same with our lives. If we add something, take something away. If we take on a greater work of love for God, let a lesser work of love go. We are human beings, not human doings. God doesn't want us to keep adding to our lives more and more things until everything collapses in a grumbling exhaustion.

This is a common problem for new Christians. Often the church helps it along by asking new Christians or New members of the church to do more and more things until they think the Church and the Body of Christ is not about relationships, abiding, but works, and it will work you to death. The word “NO” can be a deeply spiritual experience.

So let us abide with Jesus. Let us rest with Jesus and ask him what needs to come and what needs to go. And Beloved, always remember Psalm 127:2b **“God gives his beloved rest!”**

In Jesus' name amen!

