

John 15:1-12
Abiding with Jesus
Sunday July 3rd, 2016

In reference to this scripture today, Dr. Barclay wrote, *“The best way in the New Testament to invite disaster is to be useless.”* This past week the members and friends of this congregation proved that age is no barrier to usefulness and purpose. Grandparents and great grandparents loved, guided, directed and shepherded the children of our Creative Camp. They lived out the teachings of the week that God gives us: hope, courage, direction, love and power! We needed a lot of that power.

Now the warning in this scripture is that we need to be fruitful, but the positive hope and promise is that as we abide with Jesus, as we remain attached to the vine who is Jesus; we will indeed bear much fruit, fruit being works of love.

There is an order and rhythm of life in order to bear fruit. First, we must abide with Jesus; we must remain attached to him if we are to bear fruit. If we do not abide or remain attached to “the true vine,” to quote Jesus, *“We can do nothing.”* And he goes on to say, *“Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers...”*

This metaphor of Jesus as “the true vine” and we as the “branches” can be pushed too far, but the basic idea is that Jesus is the source of life, our life, and for us to grow and live and bear fruit we must remain attached to him. We must abide in him.

Now at this point I hope you are asking, “well, if it is so important to remain attached to Jesus to abide in him, how do we do that?”

Last week I gave three answers from verse 7: **we must know Jesus’ words, we must pray, and we must act.** The fourth answer came from verse 8 that **we must make a continual commitment to Jesus.**

To remain attached to the vine we must spend time with the vine with Jesus. Spending time with Jesus is the definition of abiding that I like most. The Church is Christ’s body, so we need to be in fellowship

with one another and in the corporate worship of God to be intimately attached to the Vine.

Now I want to touch on how two different types of people remain attached to the Vine Jesus Christ. There are other types and ways, but today I am only going to deal with these two.

If you are an **INTROVERT** you generally attach yourself to the Vine through and with just a few others. For many introverts, the quietness of contemplation and self-study of the scriptures and prayer is very attractive and fulfilling. That's how introverts abide with Jesus. For those who are extroverts that type of spirituality is a generally a grinding boredom.

The **EXTROVERT** finds attachment to the Vine best in larger groups of people, the more the merrier: group prayer, group Bible study, group service projects with the emphasis on the "group experience." It is also in the interaction with groups of people that the extrovert feels most recharged and rested. Groups simply wear out the introvert.

But note for both it is in relationship with others that they are established in their relationship with Jesus. It is in relationship that we abide with Jesus in his Body the Church.

In my Young Adult Bible Study on Saturday night I have a couple that attend. This last Saturday we discussed abiding with Jesus and I encouraged them to have a daily "quiet time." The woman immediately asked, "Can I listen to music during my "devotion time"?" She continued, "I can't focus unless I listen to music." She is a total extravert. Her husband is an introvert and told us he can't concentrate and focus unless he has silence. He is a total introvert.

They approach spirituality, abiding with Jesus in ways that are most meaningful to them, neither way is wrong and both ways are right; because each way is right for them.

In verses 1 & 2 of our scripture today Jesus said, *"I am the true vine and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every BRANCH in*

me that bears no fruit.” Note that here the word “branch” is in the singular. Jesus is making the point that each one of us has an individual responsibility to attach ourselves to the Vine in the best most natural way to us that we can. Devotional time is part of our continual recommitment to Jesus through the Bible and prayer.

In verse 5 Jesus says, *“I am the vine, you are the BRANCHES.”* In this verse Jesus is addressing the Church, the Body of Christ for he speaks of the “branches” in the plural. We as individuals have an obligation to abide with Jesus and then we as a community have a further responsibility to abide with Jesus together. It is called simply “fellowship and corporate worship.” We are doing that right now. We are abiding in Jesus’ presence.

Now another way we abide with Jesus is through rest in his presence. We are to bear fruit, but bearing fruit comes out of resting and abiding in Jesus’ presence. For the introvert that is an almost solitary experience and for the extrovert a group experience, but we must do what makes us most rested and recharged to do the work God has called us to do.

I have repeatedly said in this series, *“We work out of our rest. We don’t rest from our work.”* If we are doing it the other way around we are doing it out of order from the rhythm and order God has built into our lives and universe.

This is the order: rest/abide, work/be fruitful, be pruned. Start over.

Now, if you are exhausted and burned out it is beyond time to rest. If you are exhausted and burned out because of what you are doing in life and for God; it is beyond time to rest and abide with God. It’s time for pruning. Take a break.

Exhausted people can’t work very well. Exhausted people and plants can’t bear much fruit. In the Mideast in Jesus’ day new grape vines were not allowed to bear fruit for 3 years after they were planted. The vine growers knew if they let the young vines bear fruit when they were too young it would exhaust them and they would die.

So we abide, bear fruit and are pruned.

Now what are the signs of being pruned? How do you know God is pruning you so you can bear more fruit?

Well, you know you are there if you have ever said, **“I want to quit!”** I want to quit the church, my particular ministry and all this God stuff. Ah yes, God is about to prune you at that point. It is at the point you care so much that out of anger and your exhaustion you want to quit that you know God is about to prune you if you let him.

Take all that anger and frustration to God in prayer and discuss it with those of spiritual depth who will challenge you if you are just being whiny. Sometime we are just being whiny.

But times when we are so upset we want to quit these are times of possibly great growth and fruitfulness. Sometimes God says, “Yes its time for you to redirect your effort in that ministry in a more fruitful and fulfilling way.”

Sometimes we are being pruned when we think, **“I am not being fed at that church, or by that Bible study, or fellowship.”** Yes, that may be true, but sometimes God quits feeding us because we’re full. We have been fed and aren’t doing anything with the spiritual food/talents we have been given. God feeds us so that we can do the work of the Kingdom. God doesn’t just feed us to feed us. God doesn’t just rest us so we can be rested. God grants us rest so we can work. It is out of our rest we work.

Another sign you are being pruned by God occurs **when we reach a time of strange lethargy or lack of passion for previous pursuits or ministries.** It’s like God’s grace or calling has been removed for that type of ministry.

The last two years of my work as a youth Pastor I would go home on Sunday nights and spend an hour on the Internet looking for another church position. I know we as United Methodist pastors don’t make our

own appointments, or find our own churches, but still I had that sense that something wasn't working anymore. The symptom of that was, I was looking for something that I did not know what it was, until the Spirit told the Bishop and Cabinet, "send Fred to Tucson."

Finally, **it is beyond time to be pruned when you are simply exhausted by life and ministry.** Being pruned is usually not that much fun, but when exhaustion seeps in being pruned is seen as a blessing. It is time to place oneself in the rhythm of life where one rests. It is time for a Sabbath. It is time to cut things out of one's life that simply bring no joy anymore and need to be eliminated. Sometimes that really hurts because we think something is so important, but once it is gone it is no more missed than a bad headache. This comes from resting, abiding in Christ's presence.

Again it is out of rest that we work. It is out of abiding in the presence of Jesus that we draw the strength and power and life to bear much fruit. We abide, we are pruned and then we bear much fruit.

Where abiding and bearing fruit occur is often hand in hand with worship, with being in the fellowship of believers and practicing the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion.

So today in a moment we will be celebrating Holy Communion. We will be celebrating and participating in our attachment to Jesus: the True Vine. We will be celebrating and participating in our attachment, our relationship with each other. We will truly be abiding with one another and God.

In preparation for this I am going to ask you to join me in a moment of prayer to ask God if there is anything that needs to be pruned from your life so that you can rest, abide and be prepared to enjoy Jesus and do God's work and will.

Let us pray in silence.....