

Easter 5B—May 10, 2009  
Church of the Reformation—Lutheran, Affton, MO  
Text: John 15:1-8

### **Abide**

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Some words are old-fashioned, worn out. *Abide* is one of those words. When going down a highway, you rarely see a hotel advertising, “*Abide* with us.” No matter how many times the Cubs fall to the Cards, you don’t hear the announcer at the end of the inning say, “One hit, a walk, and two *abiding* on base.” Of the 17 or so uses of *abide* listed in the Oxford dictionary, eight are obsolete. Despite all of this, John still uses this word *abide* eleven times in the fifteenth chapter of his Gospel.

We usually equate “to abide” with “to remain,” yet the word has a lot more to do with persevering, continuing, lasting, staying with some—all meanings that have lost their footing in our society. We see the loss of the meaning of *abide* in our lives when friendships are broken off, when jobs evaporate despite years of loyal service, when marriage covenants are broken in divorce. Only God knows the river of tears and dysfunction set in motion by the absence of abiding in friendships, in work, in marriage, the foundation of our human community.

The Gospel reading for this fifth Sunday of Easter takes us to the night of Jesus’ betrayal, Maundy Thursday. In the upper room Jesus is surrounded by His twelve disciples, each of whom would fail to abide with Him in the hour of His greatest need. Yet it is here in the Upper Room where Jesus begins His discourse, His instruction, with the image of the vine and branches. This image of the vine and branches is a favorite reference to Israel, especially in Isaiah (5:2), who reports that God, the “**loved one**” plants vines looking “**for a crop of good grapes,**” but finds that it “**yielded only bad fruit.**” Prophet Jeremiah (2:21) depicts God as the planter of “**a choice**

**vine of sound and reliable stock;**” yet that vine turns against God and becomes **“a corrupt, wild vine.”** As these and other prophets pointed out, Israel repeatedly failed to be fruitful branches growing from the vine. The disciples of Jesus would fail too; as do His disciples today.

Because Israel failed to be the good vine, because we fail to be a good vine and branches, a true vine is needed. Jesus is that Vine as He says. Jesus, the Son of God and Son of man, is embedded here in our world, in our flesh and bone. Watered in the Jordan River, the true Vine stretches out His arms from the east to the west to take away all sins of the world as He dies on the cross. Jesus, the Vine, is then planted in **“a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever yet been laid”** (Luke 23:53). Christ died, yet now He lives. Though rooted from within that tomb, the Vine rises in the midst of a garden from which He will bear much fruit, as St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:20-23): **“Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ.”**

Because of His death and resurrection, Jesus makes us His branches, whether by Baptism’s water and Word, or by proclamation of His Word. By those means the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Jesus and to become His branches. As Luther put it this way: **“I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”** Being brought to faith, Jesus cleanses us, prunes us, removes our sin.

So how do we remain a branch with the vine? Here comes our word of the day: *abide*. Abiding takes its strength from the Christ who went to the cross for all of us. Now that Christ is

risen from the dead, *abiding* rests on belonging—He in us and we in Him. “**Abide in Me, and I in you.**” It is always first *His* grace, and only then our commitment. It is the ongoing miracle of Easter that Jesus works us into the astonishing new creation ushered in with His resurrection. Jesus abides, He lasts, He endures, He continues, He hangs in there for us, He holds on to us. He does so despite our forgetting that we have been baptized into His life. It is all His grace and mercy and love.

*Abide* is a *where* word. We abide where our Lord gathers us, even two or three of us, in His name. More than most of us realize, the powerful currents of contemporary life of appointments, agendas, and accumulation make resilient commitment to Jesus and each other difficult at best. We have seen even in the past 55 years of this congregation that abiding through thick and thin has not been easy nor is it getting easier. All the more reason, then, to anchor our abiding as the community of faith, as the body of Christ, in the Easter Gospel proclaimed and lived. All the more reason to draw deeply from the well of baptismal grace and the nurture of our Lord’s Supper to meet the hunger for things lasting and enduring. As we look back on our 55 years as a congregation, as we see and remember those who have been baptized here and confirmed at this altar, we bear witness to the sufficiency of Christ to call and to gather His own in our time. Through the Word of God taught and proclaimed here in classes and in the Divine Service, God and people have been connected in ways that have depth and endurance. The miracle of it all is that those connections take root, grow up and mature in to fruitful living that binds people together across otherwise impassible boundaries.

*Abide* is also a *when* word. It includes times of wondrous, deep-down joy as we gather for worship, as we rejoice at the baptism of a new-born infant or of an adult, as we enjoy the peace and relief of sins forgiven. Along with these radiant moments comes the abiding that is steadily

evident in the humdrum and hand-over-hand routines that occupy our waking hours. While this may seem uneventful, it is anything but that. To abide is to *infect* the world with a steadiness in one's vocation, one's occupation without sliding into the blight of taking health, sight, hearing, mind and belief for granted. To abide is to remember what the psalmist (121:8) says: **“The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.”**

There are also moments when abiding is sustained through times of numbing grief at the death of a loved one. And there are the days, weeks, and years when abiding is sustained through the constant battle with disease or despairing darkness. We are only able to abide in these times because Christ abides with us and in us. From Him we have our life. Our times, our lives, our jobs, our health are all in His abiding presence, in His hands.

An old prayer puts it best:

Abide with us, O Lord, for it is toward evening and the day is far spent; abide with us and with Your whole Church. Abide with us in the evening of the day, in the evening of life, and in the evening of the world. Abide with us in Your grace and mercy, in holy Word and Sacrament, in Your comfort and Your blessing.

Abide with us in the night of distress and fear, in the night of doubt and temptation, in the night of bitter death, when these shall overtake us. Abide with us and all Your faithful ones, O Lord, in time and in eternity, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Thanks F. Dean Lueking for insights into this text.

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