

Abide In Me

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Trinity Church in the City of Boston
Fifth Sunday of Easter
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Acts 8:26-40; Ps. 22: 24-30; I John 4: 7-21; John 15: 1-8

Lodge, house, stay, tarry, stop, sojourn, pitch tent, rest, sit, lie, keep, settle, anchor, inhabit, dwell, reside, plant oneself, live. These are only about a third of the synonyms my trusty synonym directory gives for the word “abide.” All of them convey, some to a greater degree than others, stability, continuance, sustaining – an enduring quality.

In the passage from John’s Gospel that we hear this morning the word, “abide”, is repeated 8 times. The speaker is Jesus. The setting is the last meal he ate with his friends before he died. The word, abide, indeed the phrase, “Abide in me,” comes from his mouth these many times and more, if the whole passage were read. That tells me we need to be paying attention to his use of the phrase. I’m going to do that for the next few minutes, and I invite you to come with me, to abide with me, as I do.

I might say that this assigned text stops short of the end of Jesus’ thought, but here it is, Why abide in him? Quote Jesus, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

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Many of us remember the hymn “Abide With Me.” The thought here is that Jesus responds to our need for him to come to us, to stay with us.

...when other helpers fail and comforts flee,
help of the helpless O abide with me.

A little later:

I need thy presence every passing hour;
what but thy grace can foil the tempter’s power?
Who, like thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

That hymn bespeaks our desire and our hope that Jesus be present for us, when we call him. Often, we do this in times of pain and trial. Actually, he is present for us all the time, but it is easy for us to ignore his presence, especially when we are doing just fine, thank you, on our own.

My point is that the direction of the hymn is, “Jesus, I need you to come here to be present to and with me. The direction of the Gospel passage is different.

It calls on us, Jesus' disciples to come to him and abide in him. At the turn of the 19th century a British preacher by the name of Jowett preached a sermon entitled "Abide in Christ." In it he said, "There are some people who visit Christ. There are others who abide in him. To the one class Christ is an occasional shelter; to the other Christ is an 'eternal home'."

What we hear from the pages of Scripture today is Jesus desire that we make him our eternal home. That we, for our own sake, for the fullness of our being and the fullness of our joy, choose him, fully as freely and completely as He chooses us. "Don't just drop by for a visit from time to time," Jesus is saying. "Come in. Settle down. Make me your dwelling place. There is plenty of room for everyone.

Well, supposing we might want to look into doing that or, depending where we are on the journey, supposing we want to look into how to do that more faithfully than we do now. How do we go about that?

I have a little list - practical suggestions for abiding in Jesus. They can be done. We Anglicans are very practical people. Here is the list - 10 short items:

1. In a conscious and sincere way, daily, turn your life over to God – to God's care and God's protection. Ask for grace and courage to recognize who and what God in Christ has for you to be. Not to do. Put away the busy-ness. Ask to recognize who and what God in Christ wants you to be, and then be that.
2. Read something from the Holy Scriptures of the Old and or New Testaments every day – even if it's only one verse, to begin with. (Of course, if you have been reading one verse of scripture for a number of years, you might want to consider expanding your repertoire.) Read systematically or at random. It doesn't matter which. You might also want to consider purchasing a popular commentary if you have chosen a certain section to read through. Scripture can be convoluted, and a commentary can interpret when the going gets confusing.
3. Go to church on Sunday. If you are unable to go to church, call the church and ask for Holy Eucharist to be brought to you. Do not deny yourself the meal that feeds our faith. And do not tell yourself we are too busy to come to you. No clergyperson or lay Eucharistic minister at Trinity Church is too busy to bring you Holy Eucharist.
4. Commit to the process of forgiving those who offend you, regardless of whether you see evidence of repentance in them. This is important because Jesus has called on us to do it. The prayer that he taught us contains these words, "... forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Also, and importantly, resentment and not forgiving eventually stunt the growth of the human spirit; blight our fruit bearing capacity, to use another image from the Gospel.
5. Give more money that you think you can, to the work of the body of Christ, the Church without stipulating the way it will be spent or dwelling upon how you will be repaid in some way. Dwelling in, abiding in Jesus Christ is a choice one makes to follow Christ. With time, with talent and with treasure, with all that we

are and all that we have. Abiding in Christ is not a fee for service transaction. When I find myself saying, “Why did I ever pledge that much?”, it helps me to remember all that God has given me. I could never, ever match that.

6. Tell someone you love that you love them. Do this regularly. Do not count on clairvoyance on their part. The same is true for gratitude. Express it. And for kindness, make it your goal.
7. Pray for someone you dislike to be blessed abundantly, and mean it. Like number 4, forgiving, this is difficult. When I, for example, accomplish this, I find myself unhooked you from one of my favorite enemies and one of my favorite bad feelings. And that clears out a substantial space within me. I believe it is foretaste, a glimpse of perfect freedom.
8. Practice self-care. Say “no” to practices and behaviors that leave you angry or sullen or are bad for your body. Say “yes” to those that leave you with a sense of well-being and whole-ness.
9. Allow any portion of any day to be interrupted for laughter. God has a sense of humour, no doubt about it. The world is full of funny things, and the Church is a hoot on most days. I like the saying that angels can fly because they take themselves very lightly.
10. Do your best for the causes of justice and peace and the spread of mercy and compassion, those causes Jesus preached and taught and lived and entrusted to us.

That’s the list.

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This morning we baptized 7 children. We welcomed them, as we do everyone who comes for baptism, them with the words: “We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection and share with us in his eternal priesthood.” Just as we receive them as our sisters and brothers in the Church, so Christ receives us all. The invitation stands in perpetuity for us to come and abide in him. It is never too late to accept or to go back and accept again, start over. The invitation stands so that his joy may be in us, and our joy may be complete.

So, pick your word, is it “tarry” or “rest” or “anchor” or “plant” or “abide”? Whatever you choose, remember and accept his invitation to Abide in Him – to be one with Him. And one with Him in the Father whose arms reach out to embrace all who would abide in the Son for ever; for all time and beyond time. Amen.