

For 9 May 2021, The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 10:44-48; I John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

“If” can be a very big word. Those of you who are moms and dads, think how often we have made that word a very hard word.

When your child isn’t quite used to sitting a whole hour in church – you don’t want to feel embarrassed at all, so you say to them, “IF you behave in church today, we will go to Dairy Queen after church.” And we all know that that means... "IF you don’t, then you won’t have a pleasant afternoon.”

If can be a very big word. If you do well on the test...you will get the job you want.

If you impress your boss...you will get a raise.

If you say the right things to that guy over there...you will get to date him.

If you live a healthy life style...you won’t ever get sick.

Well, I guess not all the ifs that we grow up with always hold water. But we begin to connect that “if” with what happens if we don’t.

We can follow the logic of this real well. We understand consequences. WE know what that looks like.

And so, we come across a gospel reading like today’s. “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.” We have in the back of our minds what happens IF we don’t keep his commandments.

And we start to think: I might not know what the word “abide” means – but that sounds like something that we want. And so we try to explore further.

What is the commandment Jesus wants us to do?

“To love one another as I have loved you.” He answers.

And then he talks about being willing to die for us. And I start thinking about what that love looks like. He tells us that it means being willing to lay down your life for someone else. In other words to die for them.

There are many stories about Mothers...it is Mother’s day after all...but Fathers also doing that for their children. But, what about for others.

I try to imagine the possibility of needing to die for any of you. And the only thing I can think of is a story I was once told. The people who protect us every Sunday morning might like this story. A man walked into a church one Sunday morning during worship.

He was kind of wild eyed and was just stomping down the aisle. When he got half way down, he pulled out a gun and said, “Pastor, I’m going to shoot myself, some of these people, and then you.”

The pastor replied, “Well, son, as long as you do it in that order, I’m O.K.”

I can’t think of a time that I would need to lay down my life for any of you. But kind of like that pastor, I’m not sure I would be willing to.

Then comes that word “If”. “If you keep my commandments.” And there is only one commandment there. And I know – or I question IF I am able to even to that one thing. I know that I don’t have the feelings of love for some people. I know that love here is not just a feeling, but also a call to action. And with that I know that I am not able to act with love at all times.

That is true of each of us:

- When you demand your own way, and call anyone who disagrees with you “stupid.”

- When you look out for your own wants, and forget other people’s needs. This is not acting with love.

Does that mean, I am disappointing God?

Does that mean that I don’t get to abide in his love?

And what about that word “Abide?”

Jesus is the only one that was able to keep the commandments – even this one about laying down his life for his friends. He even included you and me as his friends. People that live 2000 years after he walked this earth. So he was able to keep the commandment.

But I know that I am not.

Well sure, there are a couple of people I can think that I would be willing to die for. I would hope that if my wife, children, or grandchildren were threatened I would be willing to protect them with my life. I could be a rather large shield.

But what comes from this word “abide”, a word that seems only to be used in churches.

There are four things that abide has to do with:

1. Remain.
2. Connected
3. Live in. And
4. Protected.

Four aspects – four pictures of what Jesus is promising his disciples...IF.

Remaining. To continue for a long time – to endure. Something that lasts a very long time. When talking about this, it often seems to be about something that is positive. The Word of God remains forever or treasure in heaven abides.

An old friend comes to visit you, and you don’t want that visit to finish. Half an hour is not enough – so you get them to stay for lunch...then supper...maybe even extend the visit for a day or two. He is there with you – in a way that hasn’t happened in years. And as that visit continues something else happens.

Abiding has to do with connectedness. And that has to do with being really present with someone. Not just your body – but paying attention. That does happen rarely in our lives.

How was your day?...good.

What did you learn in school today?...nothing.

Wait until ads to talk to me.

Uha...uha...yes dear...whatever you say.

So often we don’t really pay attention to one another. And even when listening, so many other thoughts are crowding in. From forming a response to what is being said, to thinking about what lunch was.

When I abide with you, there is a connection there. A phone gives us one picture of being connected to each other. But only a partial.

Watch Jae, when Sunday worship is over, as he sits at the organ. There are those times that you can see – perhaps you can feel it – when it is as if he isn’t looking at the music in front of him – it isn’t needed. He has a connection with his instrument...where it is almost as if he isn’t playing it – but it is a part of him.

Now that I have said that, it may make him self-conscious, so it won't happen for a week or two – but I know many of you have seen it. He abides with the organ.

That is something that seems to happen. This connectedness gets broken whenever we try to force it, or focus on it. It is a product and goes hand in hand with giving of ourselves.

And so, earlier Jesus invited his disciples to have that connection with him. To be like the branches of a vine – and be that much a part of him. This is really drawing your life from him.

To be a disciple of Jesus means that your focus is so much on him, that you begin to see how he is living in and through others. And that becomes your connection with them.

Abide...it means to live in. Where you live is your abode...where you abide. And that carries with it a sense of rest. Oh I know, you might have cleaning to do when you go home – or cooking. But there is something else that you can do there, that you might not be able to do anywhere else – be you.

You can relax at the TV. You can read. You can take off your shoes, not put make-up on, and sit in quiet. “My home is my castle,” people like to say. And hopefully that means that in that place you are able to treat one another as kings and queens.

You can open your doors and invite someone in with you. Jesus wants you to be his dwelling place – that is he wants to live in you. A comfortable place, made more comfortable as he lives there not only longer, but as it reflects more and more of who he is in your life.

Which means that it is a safe place. That really is something that you desire. Not a place where winds and noise and threats are going on – but a place that you can feel safe. The church is meant to be that, not because it is a church – but because it is where Jesus is.

To abide means to come into a place where it is ok to be you – and know that you are safe.

So what does all this about “abiding” tell us?

It is connected with being connected to Jesus. When I break that connection, I no longer feel safe and protected.

It calls me to rest – live in Jesus. And from that rest I am able to connect to the needs of others.

It remains – that is it takes a whole lifetime.

And as that happens – it isn't me – but Jesus who lives in me. He is the one who did give his life for us – and beyond that gives his life into us.

And when he lives in you, you find rest – and through him – and because of him – you grow in that love, even the love of those that you do not know – or you know too well, and so Christ in you brings obedience to his commands.

Amen.

## Childrens Sermon

(at this time, my cell phone rings).

Yes...it is so nice to hear from you...but now is just not the time. Perhaps you can call again when we are able to talk...to listen to each other...when you can have my complete attention. –

that felt kinda rude didn't it? I really should have been paying attention to you – shouldn't I?

Actually, as you might have guessed, I had someone call my phone right now.

This is because I wanted to talk to you about abiding

abiding means to be present with someone – really paying attention

that is what God does with us – and Jesus invites us to abide with him – pay attention.

There are some people here who do that every day – setting aside some time. But you can also do it by just being quiet and listening to God – or paying attention in Sunday School and churches