

What does showing up, holding on, abiding in look like for you? What does it feel like? How does this unfold for you in relation to God, in relation to those in your life, in relation to your community, in relation to yourself? What do you need to do so that you can fully abide in Christ just as Christ is already abiding in you?

Let's listen to these words from the gospel of John again:

"Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15: 4-5)

Listen again, this time from Eugene Peterson's translation *"The Message"*:
"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. "I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing."

Our gospel reading today is personal and is reminding us that God is seeking a personal relationship with every single one of us, each and every day. It is personal in a way that is deeper than "fitting God into our lives"; this reading is personal in an intimate sense beyond what we can schedule in and control. We are being called to "abide in Christ". The Old English word abide "signifies progressively to "await", "remain", "lodge", "sojourn", "dwell", "encamp" "¹. The greek root of "abide" (meno) carries a range of meanings: "staying in place", "enduring", "holding out". The word *abide* is rich, it's personal and it is deeply intimate.

We hear today's teaching from Jesus during this season of Easter. These fifty days between Easter Sunday when we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus to Pentecost Sunday when we recognize the gifts of the Holy Spirit: God's very life, breath and energy within and amongst us. Today's reading from the gospel of John comes from text that appears prior to Jesus' death and holds some important teachings for the disciples to remember in the midst of his dying and rising and yes indeed, for us to remember today. We've heard over the last few weeks about how when the disciples started to hear the rumours that Jesus was alive they were shocked, afraid, filled with disbelief and hiding behind locked doors. And I don't blame them: they witnessed the death of their friend and saw where his body had been laid, I would probably be responding in the same way as they did. Jesus appearing to the disciples after his resurrection connects to today's gospel reading about abiding in Christ.

¹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/abide/>

Jesus appears in their presence and invites them to believe, to abide; not to ignore what they are feeling and experiencing but to move their fear, pain, shock and sadness from a place where they are hiding to a place where they are “staying in place” or “holding out” – a place where they are abiding in Christ. This place where their fears and sadness do not vanish, but find a home in God’s presence as they abide in Christ and Christ abides in them; a place where all can be held.

Do you see how this passage is so intimate? We are not being asked to hide anything but to bring all that we are, all that we feel and all that we experience to our abiding with Christ. Recognizing that God already knows what is on our hearts – the hopes, the dreams, the pains, the wonderings and yet calls us to bring it all into this relationship. Sometimes the most difficult thing we are called to do is to stay in place, to endure, to hold out. There are moments in life when all we want to do is to run, to hide, or to start over – from work, from life, from relationships, maybe even from God.

There are other moments in life when someone we love needs us to show up, to be fully present, to sit alongside them when things can’t be fixed or solved, when times are uncertain, when our feelings are uncomfortable. And it can be hard to abide with one another in those moments, especially when we can’t “fix” something, when we have to trust that showing up is enough. At times we might be the ones who need someone to sit with us. Henri Nouwen summarizes this nicely, what I would refer to as this “abiding with one another” – this holding holy space. He writes, “the friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing... not healing, not curing... that is a friend who cares.” When we are abiding in Christ we can be present with others and have others be present with us in a transformative way.

We are being invited not to run or hide from what is uncomfortable or unfamiliar but to sit alongside – to bring our fears, our grief, our confusion, our disbelief, our unrest to Christ and to trust that it will be held, that we will be held. Abiding in Christ calls us to be willing to sit in the midst of the discomfort that comes alongside not knowing or to be in the midst of the deep pain we are feeling and to trust that we are not alone and that all will unfold through and with Christ and that we will continue to bear fruit. Abiding in Christ does not mean our lives will always be comfortable but it does mean that we will never be alone; and over time I’ve begun to see how not being alone is a greater gift than always being comfortable. What an incredible invitation... what an intimate invitation into this relationship with Christ: to know that we will not be alone, that what is on our hearts will always be known.

This teaching from our gospel reading also provides an important reminder for us connected to our vocation; our living out who we are called to be in the world. When we can discover, explore and live fully in our identity as ones in relationship with Christ the rest will arrive and unfold. When we are joined with Christ the unknown and unfamiliar becomes less paralyzing. Hear the message again: *“just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide*

in me.” When we live fully in Christ and let go of our attempts to manage and plan right down to that final detail about how we think our lives should unfold in the order we expect it to unfold, on the timeline we have set and instead make room to be present with God and welcome God’s presence in us, we may just find ourselves opened up to hearing God’s voice, direction and call in a new way. We may find ourselves encountering something we had not been able to imagine on our own. We may see that the hopes and dreams we hold are expanded and flourish when we learn how to abide fully in Christ.

When we embrace our identity in Christ, when we lean into the vine, we will bear fruit, and it will be rich. We cannot do this alone; we are not called to do this alone. When we get out of the way and make room for God we will serve the world more fully, we will care for those we love more deeply, we will enter into richer relationships with those we encounter each day, and we will care for ourselves more generously.

The more intimately connected we are with God the more we will begin to prune away those things that distract us from our relationship with God. The more we prune away, the more time we will spend on those pieces that transform and deepen the relationship. When we give time to our relationship with God we will have time to give to the world, we will have time to be Christ’s hands and feet in service. When we welcome God’s love into our lives we can more fully love those in our own lives; knowing, receiving and embracing God’s love equips us to love one another. Abiding in Christ, being the branch that relies on the vine, will equip us to bear much fruit and goodness in our lives that can then be used for living out God’s call for us.

May we abide in Christ knowing that God’s presence in our lives give us hope and is the greatest form of love.