



[Rev. Dr. Walter Steele](#)

Sermon for Easter 6

May 5, 2024

Abide in My Love

John 15:9-17

⁹ *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

¹² *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”*

Last Sunday's Gospel introduced us to our Lord's picture of the Vine, the Vinedresser and the branches. Some would call this a metaphor. I think it is so much more. The intimate connection between the Vine and his branches cannot be overstated. The branches abide in the vine. Christians abide in Christ.

The opening words of John 15 can sound like a threat. If you do not bear fruit, you will be cut off. And this is a true statement. No vinedresser will keep fruitless branches on a vine. They are cut off and cast aside.

Furthermore, Jesus' words about fruitful branches being pruned might sound a bit scary. But this is the way it is for all things worthwhile. A coach puts his or her team through rigorous training, not to destroy but to make better. A drill sergeant takes his company to the breaking point in order that they might be a united band of brothers, ready to do battle as one.

God takes us through times of testing, sorrow, heartache, and even sickness to inculcate in us the habit of godliness, that is to bring us to heart-felt, meditation on his Word and to fervent prayer, for these are our weapons of warfare.



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But I'm beginning to mix my metaphors, so let's get back to the vineyard.

Last week you heard our Lord say: If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you may wish and it shall be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

The one who abides in Christ is the one within whom the Lord's words dwell. As a Christian reads, marks, learns and inwardly digests God's Word, his desires are shaped by that Word, being conformed to the will of God. At Neema Lutheran College, Matongo Kenya, that is a primary goal. The pastoral and diaconal students are steeped in the Word of God. The goal is to have the Word permeate their very selves so that they become men and women of God. From my biblical courses to the courses on Christian doctrine, to Robyn's Home Economics course, the Word of Christ is interwoven into all we do to form these men and women into fruitful servants of the Risen Christ.

This is what our Lord does to and for you as well. You read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the Word of Christ and are thereby transformed by the renewal of your mind. You thereby begin to bear fruit that remains. And God is praised and glorified as people see your good fruit and give thanks to the Father in heaven.

Our Lord continues with these gracious words: Just as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you! Abide in my love.

I must admit, when I read those words in the past, I didn't hear them as they are meant. I would hear, "Abide in my love," as a demand-as Law. That is not what Jesus is saying. Rather, this is a gracious invitation, maybe even a statement of fact for the Christian.

As the Father loves his Son, so the Son loves you. He loves you. Let him! Enjoy it. Bask in it. Receive the love he has for you. "Abide in my love." It's a different way of thinking.

St. Paul in his Letter to the Romans says of us, before our conversion, that we were "haters of God." To the Ephesians he writes that we are "dead in trespasses and sins." We were ungodly. And it was, when we were in such a state (the state of all human beings), that God loved us and sent his Son to save us.

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. But we were not friends of God. He has always been friendly to his creation, but we have not returned that friendship. We have mistrusted him. We have abused his name for evil. We have despised



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his Word. We have abused those he created: parents, spouses, neighbors, and sometimes even our own children. Yes, our lack of love of God is the root of our lack of love for others. Yet-yet-he loved us. He proved this love. He, in the Person of his Son, died for us, calling those who ignored him his "friends."

Here is an important point. The Greek of the New Testament uses two words that are translated as love. One has the idea of love, which includes "feeling love." But the one used here-AGAPE-is not about feeling. It is about DOING LOVE. It is love in action.

One of the hardest things for people to understand is the depth of their sinfulness. I'll use that term (sin) since I am speaking to the Church, who know that term. God pours his love out on his creatures-his unrequited love. It is not returned in kind. What could be more painful than to love someone so intensely and to have that love ignored or even spurned? But that didn't stop God from loving you.

Jesus' words to you today are these: Abide in my love. Receive it because it is real. This love is so immense that he does not merely love you now; he loved you before you even loved him in return. He loved you when you ignored his love. Jesus' love for you moved him to act on your behalf. His love took him to the cross for you.

The English Standard Version of our text for today states: This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. A deeper study of those words, though, yields a slightly different sense. Jesus says: This is my commandment, in order that you may love one another. So, we must ask: What is this commandment that, by following it, will move us to love one another?

The answer is: Abide in My Love! As you read the Scriptures, as you hear your pastors proclaim the gospel, as you take these words to heart, you will have your own love for God and thereby your love for others transformed, renewed, made alive!

You might remember the story of the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet with oil, moistened his feet with her hair and wiped them with her feet. Of her, Jesus said, "The one who is forgiven much is the one who loves much."

The first step in abiding in the depth of Jesus' love is to understand that his love for you is unmerited. What you and I deserve is not what we get. We deserve punishment; we get forgiveness. We deserve condemnation; we receive justification. We ought to experience God's wrath, but instead we are loved. The words of Jesus on the cross, "My God, why



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have you forsaken me," should have been ours. But because Jesus endured this God-forsakenness, no one need ever! To the degree that you know yourself, you will marvel at the love of God for you.

The second step is to focus of Christ Jesus. In him, in his self-giving, you will know his love. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. What is that command? ABIDE IN MY LOVE. The new obedience of the Christian life is described by the Law of God. Yet it is energized, invigorated, and grows out of the deep meditation on the gospel. The gift of righteousness imputed to you by faith in Christ is the source of the fruit you bear that glorifies God and serves your neighbor.

As you see your sinfulness, repent of it, and turn in faith to Christ each day, you thereby live out your Baptism. The Law that condemns leads to the gospel that comforts with the words of absolution. And I know of no more real way to experience this than in Individual Confession and Absolution—a practice we advocate at Matongo. This third step is a way to deeply experience the love of Christ.

Jesus says: I am the true Vine. I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever may abide in me, and I in him, that one always bear much fruit.

The beloved Church Father, Cyril of Alexandria, speaks of these words in a very practical way. We abide in Christ by Holy Baptism. He abides in us as he feeds us with his true Body and Blood. Think on it! The true Body of Christ abides in you as you take and eat, as he instructs you. This is my body, he says. Take; eat! He abides in you and you abide in him. Trusting these words, believing what Jesus says, you abide in his love and will bear much fruit.

Abide in my love, he says. These words are pure grace. Wonderful gospel. Hear them and believe it! He loves you. Receive his love, which moved him to act for you.