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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, May 9, 2021
6th Sunday of Easter/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year B
First Reading: Acts 10:44-48
Second Reading: 1 John 5:1-6
Gospel Reading: John 15:9-17
Sermon Title: “*Abiding in Love*”

Theme

On the night of his arrest, Jesus delivers a final testimony to his disciples to help them in the days ahead. Here, he repeats the most important of all his commands, that they love one another.

Text

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹²This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Sermon

This text picks up where last week's text ends and to a greater degree, this text is just a small part of what is known as the "Farewell Discourse" that coincides with the Last Supper which begins in chapter 13 of John's gospel. So even though we are in the celebratory season of Easter, textually we are back on the night of Jesus' betrayal.

Since getting into chapter 15 last week, we have heard Jesus use the word *abide* eleven times; eight times in last week's reading and three more times in today's reading. *To abide* must be a pretty important concept.

abide (μενω, meno) ~ to abide, to continue, dwell, endure, remain, stand, tarry.

Abiding is particularly important when we come to understand that Jesus is about to physically leave his disciples forever. First, he will leave them by allowing himself to be taken into custody that will lead to his crucifixion. Then following the resurrection he will leave them again to ascend to his Father in heaven. In these last few moments with them, Jesus set the parameters by which his little band of *disciples* will become *apostles* (remember, disciples are students of their master; apostles are ones sent out with a message.) and use the words Jesus himself used to transition from *servants* to *friends*.

The disciples are about to be met with some new realities. But the lessons that Jesus had taught them and that have sustained them to this point, he said, are the same things that will be required in their new reality without his physical presence. They of course will need his continued guidance. He will take care of that when he gives them his Holy Spirit to *abide* with them.

And they will need to *abide* with each other. Jesus and the twelve have been a small community for three years. They will continue to need each other, to *abide* with each other, as they obediently take the gospel to the world.

Other forms of the word *abide* are more intensive. For example the form of the word Jesus used to describe the branch abiding in the vine last week. There the word means more than simply to continue, to dwell, to endure, etc. When Jesus used this word he meant that to separate oneself from God revealed in himself is

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like separating the branch from the vine. The branch is disconnected from its source of life and without question will die.

And so it is with us, if we choose to separate ourselves from God in Christ, we will die – perhaps not a physical death, but certainly a spiritual death.

Before we get too much farther, we need to look back a couple of chapters at something important Jesus said at the beginning of this conversation that has resonance in the passage we have for today. And it should sound familiar. You just heard it six weeks ago on Maundy Thursday

John 13:34–35

³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

In these verses, and again in 15:9–10, Jesus indicated that the basis of the Christian community's *abiding* with him is the love that he and God share. And he further said that it is this kind of love that the community is called to enact. And beyond that Jesus said that the joy of his disciples cannot be complete without this abiding love.

Perhaps you have met people in your travels that were just cranky. They may never have been happy. Who knows, maybe they were dropped on their heads as children, but they are just cranky and no fun to be around. If these same people could ever get what Jesus was trying to say, it would change their lives and the lives of people around them. We all need to *abide* in the love of God.

(Pause)

If the passage ended here, Jesus' words would be *nice* and *full of love*, the type of expressions we have come to expect from Jesus, and we could all nod our heads and agree that we should love each other more and go home. But the passage doesn't end here. Verse 13 is off-putting no matter when it is heard, but it must have been particularly off-putting in Jesus' day.

¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

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Let me remind you of the context: Jesus sat at table with his disciples celebrating the Passover. Today we know that meal by another name, the Last Supper. In just a few moments Jesus left the company of these devoted followers and allowed himself to be taken into custody that would lead to his crucifixion. He said the words, and then demonstrated their extraordinary power and his extraordinary love.

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

This text, together with the text from last week, further explains the relationship between Jesus, his Father, and his disciples. The vine and the branches are intermingled and the vinegrower's attention makes for a bountiful harvest. But we cannot do it alone and it was never God's design that we do. We are to *abide* in God's love and *abide* in the love of the Christian community created out of the passion of our Lord and shaped by love and grounded in Christ's presence.

Prayer

Loving God, in you we find purpose and redemption, love and grace. By the power of your Holy Spirit help us to abide in your love, and help us to abide in the love of the Christian community. Amen