

Introduction to the themes for day and season

Today's Gospel reading brings a subtle yet important shift in Jesus' words about abiding as branch does to vine. Now we're invited to abide in his love—just as last week we were invited to abide in him. Abiding is about survival and it's about abundant life.

Prayer of the Day *O God you have prepared for those who love you joys beyond understanding. Pour into our hearts such love for you that, loving you above all things, we may obtain your promises, which exceed all we can desire; through Jesus Christ, your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you. and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

Gospel John 15:9-17

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. 12"This 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

Someone recently shared a story about how they came to be part of their local congregation. For some the story is very familiar. A first time visitor with kids in tow, feeling very uncertain in a new place courageously shows up to worship and maybe to find community. Almost right away someone welcomes her and

immediately redefines the relationship...”you don’t have family nearby? I will be your family.” And so it was. And is...some twenty years later.

Jesus offers the same quality of relationship to his followers...”I call you friends”. Jesus’ friendship means being present for his friends. From day one he lays down his life in a sense when he invites would-be followers into his life when they ask where he lives and what he’s about. “Come and see”, he offers.

Near the end he washes feet. In those days foot washing was not symbolic. It was a necessary preamble to shared space, shared meals, and shared community. The sort of love and friendship Jesus extends is tangible. On Maundy Thursday this year, when we read about Jesus’ care for his friends we counted six verbs...actions Jesus took to care for the physical, social, and spiritual needs of his friends.

Jesus has shown us what abiding in love looks like. He says more and our reading schedule doesn’t include the part where he says many who follow him will be expelled from the synagogue and some disowned by their families. In those days being disowned meant you lost your identity because it was based in the family you were part of. Being shunned also means figuring out how to survive now that you were cut off from your entire social safety net. And it’s to these Jesus says, “I will be your friend...I will be your family...I will bring abundant life”.

So it was then... so it is now for us. Likewise even as Jesus gives abundant life he calls on his friends to befriend others and to be truly present with them. In a world that many believe is dying from loneliness, bearing fruit just might mean going back to Jesus’ greatest commandment; love one another just as you have been loved.