

Abide in Me

Faith Resurrected: Part 5 “Abide in Me”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – May 2, 2021

5th Sunday of Easter

Readings: Acts 8:26-40; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

Reflection: Psalm 22

Greeting: Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

Prayer: Almighty God, through your only Son you overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we who celebrate our Lord’s resurrection, by the renewing of your Spirit, arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 22

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it. (Psalm 22:25-31 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 22 and we hear of how praise of the Lord will endure forever. That God rules over the nations. That we should live for the Lord. Does it give you hope to think about future generations speaking of God’s love? How do you share your experience with Christ with others? How do we share in the joy of our Risen Savior?

Prayer: O God, our grove, our lover, our well: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your garden. Marry us now and for ever, and give us to eat from the tree of life; hear our prayers and have mercy, through Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Acts chapter 8, verses 4 through 40.

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. (Acts 8:26-40 NRSV)*

Our next reading is from 1 John chapter 4, verses 7 through 21.

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. (1 John 4:7-21 NRSV)*

Our last reading is from John chapter 15, verses 1 through 8.

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 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. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. (John 15:1-1 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We continue our Easter series entitled “Faith Resurrected” with our next message “Abide in Me.” Every message in this series is going to be using a phrase from the Gospel reading for that week. This week we look at what it means to abide in Christ and have Christ abide in us, to live within us as we live within him. And we get the opening for this in our Gospel reading. Jesus is talking about being the true vine and that if we are going to bear fruit, we are going to be able to do good, to do God's work, then we must abide in Christ so Christ can abide in us. A theme that we have had through this series is that we live in Christ and Christ lives in us. That we're guided by the Holy Spirit, that he leads us, so that we can do good. If Christ is with us then God is with us, then God is glorified. That if we abide in Christ, we become his disciples and we do his will.

John's first letter expands on that, talking about how we love. And John expands this very much into this idea of how much we're supposed to love. That if Christ is in us, then we are going to love completely. That if God lives in us, then that love will be perfected within us. And if that love is perfected in us then we will be able to love all. And one of the interesting things that John puts forward in this is that we can't hate our brothers and sisters if claim we love God, because to have God's love is to love our brothers and sisters as God loves them. That to love means to care. Those who claim to love God must demonstrate love for others. That love casts out fear, because we have no fear of punishment if we abide in Christ.

Now, one might ask then what does our reading from Act have to do with any of this? It seems to come out of left field with the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. However, sitting and thinking about that meeting made me think about the way that Philip was demonstrating love and the way that Christ was opened up to the Ethiopian eunuch. And it's fitting that the eunuch is reading Isaiah, not just for the passage that's quoted, but because Isaiah is also a place that would have given the eunuch hope. Now, the reason for this is that according to the law of Moses, a eunuch couldn't be part of the group. They were cut off from the congregation because of their condition. That because of their castration, they wouldn't be allowed in the highest places. That they were defective. Now there's many reasons for this, but

the overall feel is that a eunuch wouldn't be welcomed in under those old laws. But Isaiah makes the argument that if somebody is going to follow God, that shouldn't matter. That if somebody is going to turn to God, then why should they be turned away because of something physically different about them? And what we see with Philip, coming and instructing the Ethiopian eunuch, is an act of love. Because he stops and he helps to explain the scripture to him, tells him about Christ, spreads the good news to somebody that otherwise might have been looked down upon.

This caught my attention because Philip is demonstrating the kind of love that our other readings are talking about. Because the idea of that love is to love all, to welcome all, that all who want to follow Christ are welcome to join in him and be part of him so that Christ can live in them. In essence, Philip is rejecting this idea that this person isn't good enough and that this person should be excluded. Philip takes that to about the most extreme that we could expect him to take it. Because the eunuch asks if there anything stopping them from being baptized. Could he be welcomed in? And the answer is yes. For me, that raised a really interesting point. Someone who had once been excluded by the law is now welcomed in because of God's love. Because Christ's sacrifice wasn't for some but was for all. And if it was for all then none of those doors can be closed. Does it fly in the face of the law that was handed down? Yeah. It most certainly does. But it also hears the words of the prophets that came before Christ. The prophets who asked, "Why are we trying to keep people away from God? Who are we to keep people away from God?" And Philip shows the kind of love that's discussed in John's letter and in John's gospel. The Ethiopian eunuch is wanting to live a life in Christ, to become a disciple. That he's heard the good news. That Philip has spoken of how Christ died on the cross and he rose from the dead to conquer sin and death and to give life everlasting. And Philip is not asking questions about if there is anything physically wrong with you that's going to keep you from being able to follow Christ. He wants to know, are you inviting Christ in?

On first glance, this might not seem like that big of a thing. Well, of course he's seeking to be part of the group. Why wouldn't he be allowed in and if he believes? But then again, there's always those lines drawn in the sand. One could turn to Leviticus and Deuteronomy and declare that eunuchs are not allowed. They're defective. They're not good enough. Now we could have all sorts of discussions and arguments about the way that plays out and the role of eunuchs in the Bible, which is a much longer in-depth discussion than we have time for here today. But the thing it brought out to me was that Christ wasn't looking for people already perfect, already doing everything they were supposed to do. So often the good news was preached to those who felt they had nothing left. That they had already been turned away and there was no good news for them. There's a reason that in Christ's ministry we constantly see him being chided for the people that he keeps company with. That he's chided for being with tax collectors and prostitutes. He is seen with all sorts of undesirables. And yet, what we see time and again is his love for people. Because what Christ teaches us is to look past our own judgments, which means looking past our own fears. Because truly it is fear that causes us to

be exclusive. If love is the encompassing inclusive act that draws people to Christ, exclusiveness is the thing that pushes them away from God's love. We cannot ask people to change their hearts and their lives without loving them. We cannot ask people to follow Christ without first loving them. No, we cannot say "change and God will love you" because the message that we get is "God loves you, so change your hearts." But to do that, our hearts must be willing to change. Who are the tax collectors and the prostitutes and the eunuchs that you see in your life? Who are the people that you may have viewed as unworthy of following Christ? And that's going to be a tough question to ask yourself. The reason is, is because the answer puts us in the wrong. Because if there are people that we find that are not deserving of God's love, then we must ask ourselves if we are worthy. Christ does not say to us, "Become worthy and then live in me" but Christ says, "live in me and I will make you worthy. Join with me and be born again. Overcome the temptations of the flesh to live with me and enter my Kingdom." Not one built on keeping people out but one on inviting people in. Not one based on who is the greatest but one based on who is deserving of love.

That's the message that I take away from Christ's words. That if we are going to live in him, we are going to abide in him. When he calls us and says, "Abide in me" he is saying, live with me and love as I love, so that you can love everyone. So that you don't live in fear of others. So that you can love others. So that you can help others. Love others so that you can further the kingdom of God. Don't think about what's going to keep you from loving them, but think about why you should love them, and how you should love them, and love others as you love God because God loves them. Become the person who can walk into the room and say, "peace be with you" and peace is found because you offer the peace of Christ. That we pray for others because of our love. That we help others because of our love. That we share in one body redeemed by one blood so that we can be of one people, God's people. Not thinking about who to keep out, but thinking always of how we can welcome others into a life in Christ, so that we may all share in the joy of our risen Savior. So that we may all join together in the peace and the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: We are reluctant, O Author of Love, to set aside our hurt, our anger, our disappointment. Heal us with your tender touch, that we might be cleansed of all unclean thoughts, all schemes of revenge, all hope of vindictive retribution. Open our eyes to the power of love, shown to us in the unselfish sacrifice of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Faith Resurrected

Our series is *Faith Resurrected*, and each week's title is taken from the words of Christ as we explore what it means to serve a Risen Savior.

April 11th – *Come to Believe* - Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

April 18th – *You are Witnesses* – Acts 4:32-35; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

April 25th – *Listen to My Voice* – Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18

May 2nd – *Abide in Me* – Acts 8:26-40; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

May 9th – *I Chose You* – Acts 10:44-48; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

May 16th – *Be Sanctified* – Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-19

May 23rd – *He Will Guide You* – Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke	Don Wells
Tricia Adkins	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen	Don Stewart	Michael & Makenzie Reynolds
Ronnie Winstead	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons	Trinity Powers
Lauren Stewart	Charlie Henderson	Rosalee Chancellor	Phyllis Gable
Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland	Family of Davey Yaw	Family of Wilma Clark
Terri Kemper	Darrell Quick	Family of Hugh Eubank	Shelley Murphy
Family of Doris Devall	Family of Doris Devall	Family of Macel Buss	Family of Winona Saathoff
Jeff Davidson	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite
Donna Graham	Kevin Drum	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer
Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Kim Hennes

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