

Fifth Sunday after Easter
May 2, 2021

Abide in Jesus.

If we abide in Jesus, then He abides in us. The eternal relationship has been established by Him and for Him. You are invited, but do you live the invitation? Sometimes, I suspect we live on emotion. If I feel like it, I will do something, but if I do not feel like it, I sit back and do nothing. But that is not the way of relationship. A good relationship is one doing for another because it should be done. True love is when things are done with no other motive than that it needs to be done.

No greater love has one for another than that they would lay down their life for their friend. Christ is our friend because He has laid down His life for us. Worldliness does get in the way, so I remind you to seek the greater things. The way of love is not feelings, but action. It is to this action that we are called, for the way of love comes through what we do, not what we feel or think. It is into this life of living the love of God that our faith not only comes alive, but grows.

Listen to Jesus simple instructions. You cannot do this on your own. You cannot. So often, we try to do things on our own, but without the Lord, it is impossible. You know that Scripture tells you that with the Lord, all things are possible. Listen to the dependency. I know that our culture promotes our independence. Pick up your bootstraps and get going. The world is filled with people who want to operate independently. But not so you. The Lord has given explicit instruction. If you walk with the Lord, then He must lead. He is not your co-pilot. He must be the One who leads the way. Abide in Him.

The Father will prune the branches. Every time you are pruned, it is painful and you may cry out to the Lord, "Where are you." He is preparing you to bear fruit. This is a critical moment, for you may be tempted to ask what the Lord what He is up to. Remember what we heard from John, "What we will be, we do not know." It is enough to focus on becoming like Jesus. In this age, that last part of the Great Commission is tough enough. Focus on learning how to obey all that the Lord commands. And You know what He commands: "Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself."

What are we to do in this place? It is not difficult to understand, but sometimes, it is very hard to do. We are to love one another. But, do not let this world's idea of love get in the way. It is not about how you feel about another. You know how to love the way God instructs us to love. It is not about having fond feelings. You do not have fond feelings about yourself. In fact, when you are disappointed in something you have said or done, in that moment, you may be disappointed in yourself, but you are truly loving yourself. It is because you care enough about yourself to be subject to the disappointment that you are truly loving. Carry this forward to others.

In this world, we hear, "If you love me, you will . . ." That is nothing less than manipulation, seeking to coerce another into an action you want. God does not work this way and neither should we. Think more in terms of family, for we have been invited into the family of God. Every family has its way of doing things, just as God has already told us how things are done in His family. It is not a matter of trying to figure out how to fit in. It is a matter of conforming. Put on Christ is how we often say it. Act as if you are a member of the family and soon, you actually will be acting as a member of the family. If another is not acting as a member of the family, love them enough to say so. It is here that we are challenged to actually put into

action these things which our Lord is directing us to. We know He is in us because He has given us His Spirit.

Our Lord is so purposeful, patient, kind, and merciful that He awaits the time when all who will cease their rebellion and come to Him will have done so. On a personal level, I ask on His behalf, "What are you waiting for?" If not today, when? If not now, why? Each day, we have the opportunity to humbly come to the place where Jesus is abiding in us, directing our days and our deeds.

If human justice was denied our Lord, we do well to realize that it could well be denied us as well. This means that we cannot trust in the fickle nature of this world, but look, with hope, at the promise of true and eternal justice which our Lord promises.

Our Lord underwent a baptism of repentance for our sake. He opened the way for us to join Him in the journey of becoming. When we are baptized, He gives us His promises and we are called into His eternal presence by the gift of the Holy Spirit which is ours. Jesus instructed us that we must be born again, and in this life, it is this very birth for which we are being prepared. What we will be is in the Lord's hands.

And so it was, while the Ethiopian was reading Isaiah that he puzzled over what Scripture was saying. By the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Phillip was instructed to go and meet the Ethiopian. He did. My friends, what more clear instruction do you need? The Holy Spirit will ask you to do something. You will or you will not. The joy of the Christian life comes in accepting the invitation of the Holy Spirit to join in with what the Lord is doing. Phillip went and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, connected the dots for the one searching for meaning.

Beginning with the baptism of repentance, Phillip told the Ethiopian about what Jesus has done. He who knew no sin became our sin that when He died, our sin died with Him. Yes, He was sent to suffer the demands of sin. He laid down His life that we who, without Him, have no life, might be given His life. It is in His life, or as we say, the life He gives us, that we find the purpose for which we have been created.

A little thing about this word baptism. Sometimes we make more of it and in so doing, actually make less of it. The word literally means to be immersed. Into what then are we immersed? Is it water? Then I am baptized in water almost every day. With every shower, swimming in a pool, or jumping into a lake, I am baptized. But that is not what we are talking about. It is about being immersed in the life of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Do see the connection. To be immersed in Christ is to abide in Him. This is no once and done thing, but what we are to do without ceasing.

Do not worry about the time or place. Do not worry about the circumstances. The Ethiopian was introduced to the Lord and from that introduction, He went back and shared the Gospel in his own land. From every tribe, tongue, folk and nation come those whom the Lord knows who will hear His voice and follow Him.

The Father delights in those who learn from the Lord and follow Him. For those who cease the rebellion and come into abiding in the truth which has been revealed, it is the beginning of new life. That life begins again each day as the Lord, having freed us from the bondage to sin, death, and the devil, grows in us, day by day, the image of Christ. You are here. Good for you. Walk fully abiding in the Lord and all I can say is, "Better for you." You have been cleansed by the word our Lord has spoken to you. Now be encouraged to go where the Lord sends you. Do not tarry, nor be hindered, but walk in the freedom which is Yours. It is a freedom to be a child of the Heavenly Father and a worker with Christ in the vineyard of this age. Perfect love casts

out all fear. You are in the hands of the Lord and so, in faith, trust that all He brings your way shall fulfill His perfect will. Be encouraged, bear much fruit, and be our Savior's disciples. Amen.