



SERMONS THAT WORK

Easter 6 (B)

Abide in Love

RCL: Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

Jesus said to his disciples, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 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. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

“Abide” is not a word we use much these days. We do not often ask people, “Where do you abide?” You will likely come across the word more times while reading the Gospel of John than you ever will in real-life conversation. In fact, if you read through just the first eleven verses of John 15 (NRSV), you will find the word eleven times.

This sheer repetition reminds us of its importance as a theme in John’s Gospel. It revisits an idea that emerges in the Prologue to the Gospel of John; John 1:14 says, “The Word became flesh and lived among us,” though, as Cynthia Briggs Kittredge points out in *Conversations with Scripture: The Gospel of John*, the Greek is more literally that the Word dwelt among us as in a tent. The Word pitched a tent or “camped out” among us and showed us the embodiment of God’s love. In Jesus’ life, God’s love walked and talked among the people of first-century Galilee and Judea. And in the passage we read today, Jesus is teaching his disciples how to walk in those shoes, too, especially once he is no longer walking around with them. He is preparing them to continue to dwell in that same love.

Today’s passage is part of the long dialogue Jesus shares with the disciples after he has washed their feet and before he is handed over to the authorities to be crucified. He is trying to prepare them for his absence and instruct them in how to continue to live into his ministry, even when they can no longer see him. “Abide in my love,” he says. “Make my love the house, the tent, the shelter in which you dwell and move around in,” he seems to say.

The word translated as “abide” can also be translated as “remain,” or “stay,” and after the year we have had, we are *very* familiar with those words. After a year of lockdown, quarantine, and physical distancing, we know what it means to remain. To shelter in place. To stay. We have become intimately familiar with the inside of our own homes and maybe with the interior of our own minds in ways we likely haven’t before. And we’ve had time to think about what kind of place we want to shelter in. Priorities shifted or

became clearer, which prompted changes both small and large. Many people moved in the past year; some left bustling, crowded cities in search of a quieter, slower pace of life and a little more space. Some moved closer to family or closer to wherever feels like “home,” when the need for connection and a support network became impossible to ignore.

And we have had more than a little time to think about what *kind* of home we want and need to abide in. Maybe you’ve added onto your patio to allow for a socially distanced visit with a neighbor. Perhaps you’ve converted some corner of your home into an office or virtual school space. Or maybe you have simply been faced with how unsuitable your space is for all the demands placed upon it this year.

No matter our circumstances, this year has trained us to have a sense of the depth of the word “abide” in the Gospel of John. We have become uniquely aware of the importance of home, of where we dwell, and of how we live within it. This year, home has made all the difference, for better or for worse.

To listen to Jesus’ words in this passage with 2021 ears is to be reminded that our homes reflect our priorities, and our home base affects how we live our lives. Jesus’ invitation to abide in his love becomes all the more striking. We can imagine Jesus elaborating, “Let my love be the foundation under your feet, let my love permeate the walls that shelter you, and let my love form the roof arching over your head.” Jesus’ encouragement is not only to rest and nest in God’s love but also to live our lives in such a way that reflects that love built the house we live in—to live in such a way that when others see our interactions, it’s clear that love drew the blueprint.

And yet just as building or making a home takes time, so does learning to let love be our home base. The disciples hid away in a locked room for a while before they ventured out to share the good news and carry on Jesus’ ministry—before they realized abiding in Jesus’ love wasn’t so much about the physical space they inhabited or his physical presence with him as it was about the way they lived among others.

For us too, this passage can serve to remind us that whether home has been a refuge and comfort in the past year or a place we couldn’t wait to leave, we also have a home in the love of God. It’s a home we carry with us, like a tent, and it shows up when we remember God’s love for us and when we treat others as God’s beloved.

It shows up when we create a loving space to really listen to someone else, to be present with them in their need or struggle. That space is a home built by love.

It shows up when we contribute toward building a shelter for those without homes. That effort creates a space for love to dwell.

It shows up when we alter our habits to show more care for creation. That shift adds room for love to abide.

It shows up in small kindnesses between strangers and friends alike. It shows up when we respond graciously to someone who disagrees with us. It shows up in all the ways, large and small, that we allow the love of God to guide us.

This home is recognizable because, though it may involve sacrifice, it is also permeated with joy. As Jesus says to the disciples, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” Jesus knows that there is fullness of life to be found in abiding in love and that though his disciples’ lives may be marked by hardship, all who abide in God’s love experience the deep joy of dwelling there.

So just as we have learned to stay and to remain this year, may we also learn to abide: to abide in God’s ever-present love, a gracious and hospitable dwelling, permeated with joy. Amen.

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