

Georgia 2019 Lenten Season of Prayer and Study



The Christian Church in Georgia invites its family to pray and study together during the Lenten season. The material is provided by the General Assembly Bible Study series. There are six studies provided.

We will start the study on Wed March 6, 2019 and have prayer together every Monday starting March 11- April 15, 2019. The ZOOM call number is 1 (646) 558-8656. ZOOM Meeting ID: 292 044 350.

L.I.F.T. (John 12:32)

- Love everybody
- Inspire all generations
- Focus on Christ
- Transform Communities

2018-2019 Mission Strategies

- Congregational Health
- Clergy Health
- Evangelism
- Social Concerns
- Outreach/Missions

"The time is now to Abide with one another" is a reminder for us to bring the abiding presence of God to others as we share the love of God through outreach and service.



2019 General Assembly July 20-24
Des Moines, Iowa

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. 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. 11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. [1](#) (John 15:1-5)

Week 1

This week, we are reminded to abide in Christ by loving God and loving everybody for the purposes of fulfilling the call to discipleship. Pray about congregational health across the region.

By the Rev. Yakelin Santos

Biblical text: John 15:1–12

About the Text

The passage that is the basis for today's lesson is part of the cycle of affirmations that Jesus makes about himself: "I am." In this case, the affirmation is, "I am the true vine." This allegory of the vine is embedded in what scholars call the farewell discourses of Jesus (John 14–16). Just before, in the chapter prior to the passage we are pondering today and likewise ensuing from another "I am" (the way, the truth, and the life), Jesus presents to his disciples the relationship he has with his Father: "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me" (John 14:11a-b). In other words, Jesus explains that the One abides from eternity in the Other.

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Throughout the allegory of the vine, Jesus makes two invitations. First, he invites us to abide in him and bear fruit; second, he makes us aware of the futility of being separated from him, because “without me ye can do nothing.” This passage also ends in a double clause. He first explains what it means to abide in Jesus, and after this explanation, turns it into a commandment: “that ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Love is what lets us be linked to God. Love is the essence of how Jesus abided in his Father: “...for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24d). In the same way that love affirmed a relationship of mutual permanence between the Vine and his Father, it creates a similar relationship between him who is the Vine and us who are the branches.

The relationship between abiding and loving then becomes completely clear: “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love” (John 15:9). It was love that compelled Jesus to raise himself up on the ignominious tree, just as the vine is raised up on the tree that gives it and its fruit life.

Reflections on the Text for Today

Even though the relationship of human beings with God is personal, it is by no means individual. Our love toward God must be displayed in our love toward our neighbor. The Decalogue contains the same amount of commandments related to God as those related to the neighbor. Our relationship with our neighbor is a reflection of our relationship with God—“...in earth, as it is in heaven.” Failing to exercise love separates us from Him who is the vine and without whom we can do nothing.

Even though the word *hatred* is in technical terms the antonym of the word *love*, in practical terms, selfishness is the opposite of love. Selfishness, both covert and overt, reigns in today's world. We frequently look for ways to dictate what “I want,” in a sort of emotional gluttony, as it were. Let us remember that the three great scandals in the early Christian church were linked to selfishness and lack of love (Ananias and Saphira, Acts 5:1-11; daily distribution to the widows, Acts 6:1; Simon the sorcerer, Acts 8:9-21).

We currently live in a society that underscores selfishness and considers the teaching of love to be a weak or defunct force. Many leaders in different spheres seem to exult in words and actions that are contrary to love. We fall into a trap if we think that is the correct way to conduct ourselves. Every time our spirit, words, or actions go against love, it is like we are trying to be separate from the true Vine, and separated from Him who is the true Vine, we can do nothing.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. How can I respond in love even when I am not being treated with love?
2. How can I show love to my rebellious son/daughter, the brother/sister in my congregation with a worship style that is drastically different from mine, a person from the opposite political party, my unruly neighbor, my disrespectful coworker, etc.?

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3. What are the areas in which it is especially difficult for me to “abide in the Lord?”
4. In addition to the metaphor (example) of the vine, what other examples can you think of that help you see/understand how we should remain in the Lord?
5. What concepts of this lesson in the sections *About the Text* and *Reflections on the Text for Today* have particularly caught your attention? Why?
6. How do you compare or contrast the concept of “abide in me” you had before this lesson to the one you have now based on the discussion in class?
7. How do you interpret the illustration that accompanies this lesson? Have you thought of this metaphor before? Do you believe that the branch is likewise crucified? Review what the writer of the letter to the Galatians thinks about this (2:20). How does this verse focus on the concept of “abide in me?”

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Week 1 – Spanish

Rev. Yakelin Santos

Ilustración por Nicole Espejo,

Iglesia cristiana de Springfield en Virginia.

Porción bíblica – Juan 15: 1-12

Acerca del texto

La porción que sirve como base a la lección para el día de hoy es parte del ciclo de afirmaciones que Jesús hace sobre sí mismo: “Yo soy”. En este caso, la afirmación es “Yo soy la vid verdadera”. A su vez, esta alegoría de la vid, está insertada en lo que los estudiosos han llamado los discursos de despedida de Jesús (Juan 14-16). Justo en el capítulo previo a la porción que hoy consideramos e igualmente a raíz de otro “Yo soy” (el camino y la verdad y la vida), Jesús presenta a sus discípulos la relación que Jesús mismo tiene con su Padre: “Creedme, que yo soy en el Padre y el Padre en mí” (Juan 14: 11 a-b). Es decir, Jesús explica que el Uno permanece desde siempre en el Otro.

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A lo largo de la alegoría de la vid, Jesús hace dos invitaciones. En primer lugar nos invita a permanecer en El y a llevar fruto; en segundo, nos crea consciencia de la futilidad de estar separados de El ya que "separados de mí nada podeis hacer". De igual forma, la porción termina con una doble cláusula. Primero aclara en qué consiste el permanecer en Jesús y luego esta aclaración la convierte en un mandamiento: "que os améis unos a otros como yo os he amado" (Juan 15:12). El amor es el elemento que nos permite estar vinculados a Dios. El amor es la esencia de cómo Jesús permanecía en su Padre: "...porque me has amado desde antes de la fundación del mundo" (Juan 17:24d). De la misma manera que el amor afirmó una relación de mutua permanencia entre la Vid y su Padre, crea una similar relación entre quien es la Vid y quienes somos los discípulos.

La relación entre permanecer y amar queda del todo clarificada "Como el Padre me ha amado, así también os he amado; permaneced en mi amor" (Juan 15:9). Fue el amor lo que llevó a Jesús a levantarse en el madero, al igual que se levanta la vid en el madero que la sostiene.

Reflexiones acerca del texto para el día de hoy

Aunque la relación del ser humano con Dios es personal, de ninguna forma es individual. Nuestro amor hacia Dios tiene que verse plasmado en nuestro amor hacia el prójimo. El decálogo tiene igual cantidad de mandamientos relacionados con Dios que los relacionados con el prójimo. Nuestra relación con nuestro prójimo es un reflejo de nuestra relación con Dios; "... como en el cielo, así también en la tierra". La falta del ejercicio del amor, nos separa de quien es la Vid y de quien separados, nada podemos hacer.

Aunque la palabra odio, es en términos técnicos el antónimo de la palabra amor, en términos prácticos el egoísmo es lo opuesto al amor. Hoy día el egoísmo solapado al igual que el evidente se ha entronado. Como si fuera una especie de gula emocional, con frecuencia buscamos cómo imponer lo que "yo quiero". Recordemos que los tres grandes escándalos de la iglesia cristiana temprana estuvieron vinculados al egoísmo y al desamor (Ananías y Safira, Hechos 5: 1-11; distribución diaria a las viudas, Hechos 6:1; Simón el mago, Hechos 8: 9-21).

Hoy día vivimos en una sociedad que subraya al egoísmo afirmando el amor como una fuerza débil u obsoleta. Muchos de los líderes, en todas las esferas, parecen ufanarse en sus palabras y acciones contrarias al amor. Caemos en una trampa si pensamos en ésa, como la forma correcta de desempeñarnos. Cada vez que nuestro espíritu, palabras o acciones van en contra del amor, equivale a un intento de estar separados de la Vid verdadera y separados de quien es la Vid verdadera, nada podemos hacer.

Preguntas para la reflexión y la discusión

1. ¿Cómo puedo responder en amor cuando no estoy siendo tratado con amor?
2. ¿Cómo puedo demostrar amor a: mi hijo/a rebelde, el/la hermano/a de la congregación con un estilo de adoración dramáticamente diferente al mío, alguien de partido político opuesto, mi vecino/a insolente, el/la compañero/a de trabajo irrespetuoso/a?

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3. ¿Cuáles son otras áreas donde se me hace particularmente difícil “permanecer en el Señor”?
4. Adicional a la metáfora (ejemplo) de la vid, ¿en qué otros ejemplos puedes pensar que te ayuden a ver/entender cómo debemos permanecer en el Señor?
5. ¿Qué conceptos en las secciones de esta lección Acerca del texto y Reflexiones acerca del texto para el día de hoy han captado tu atención en forma particular? ¿Por qué?
6. ¿Cómo compara o contrasta el concepto de “permaneced en mí” que tenías previo a la clase con el que tienes a raíz de la discusión en clase?
7. ¿Cómo interpretas la ilustración que acompaña esta lección? ¿Habías pensado en esta metáfora antes? ¿Crees que el pómpano está igualmente crucificado? Repasa lo que el escritor de la carta a los Gólatas piensa al respecto (2:20). ¿Cómo este verso enfoca el concepto de “permaneced en mí”?

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Week 2 – Korean & English

This week, we are reminded to abide in Christ by being the branches of Jesus in the world as we seek to transform communities. Pray about out reach and mission across the region.

By Miseon Choi, student and HELM Scholar, Disciples Seminary Foundation

여러분은 처음 이 본문의 말씀을 접하고 어떠셨습니까? 아마도 "나는 포도나무요 너희는 가지라"는 예수의 말씀은 우리에게 매우 친숙한 말씀일 것입니다. 저에게도 이 말씀은 매우 친숙하게 다가왔습니다. 왜냐하면 주일학교에서 매우 자주 다뤄지는 말씀이기도 하며, 여러 목회자들이 자주 사용하는 본문이기 때문입니다. 그리고 우린 이 말씀에 따라 열매 맺는 일에 집중합니다. 허나 저는 이 본문이 열매 맺는 것에 집중하라는 말씀보다는, 우리가 세상에서 가지로서의 역할을 잘 하고 사는지에 대한 질문을 던지는 말씀이라 생각합니다. 왜냐하면 열매를 맺는 것은 하나님이 하시는 일이기 때문입니다. 따라서, 본문의 말씀은 열매가 아닌, 우리의 삶을 돌아보는데 집중하라는 말씀인 줄 믿습니다:

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‘예수님이 포도나무이고 우리가 가지라면 나는 가지로서 나무에게 영양분을 받기 위해 잘 붙어있는지? 또한 그 영양분을 열매에게 잘 전달하는 통로로서 가지의 역할을 잘 하고 있는지?’ 곧, 이 말씀은 가지로서의 우리의 정체성과 역할을 확실히 하는데 더욱 큰 초점이 있습니다.

What was your first impression, when you read John 15:1-5? “I am the vine, you are the branches,” is a very familiar passage for us. This phrase was very familiar for me as well because this passage usually is dealt with in Sunday School and in popular texts that many pastors use in their sermons. And we only focus on bearing fruit. But I think it is not so much about focusing on bearing fruit, but it is a question about whether we are living well as branches in the world. It is God’s work to bear fruit. Therefore, I believe the passage is not about fruit, but focuses on looking back on our daily lives: if Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches, do I attach myself to the vine for nutrients? Do I accomplish the role of a branch that sends the nutrients to the other parts of the tree, acting as a bridge that connects the vine and the fruit? Thus, this passage has greater focus on asking our identity and role as a branch.

우리는 흔히 ‘당신은 누구입니까?’라는 질문을 받을 때, 이름이나 나라, 사회의 직책 등으로 자신을 소개합니다. 하지만, 무엇보다 우선되어야 하는 우리의 정체성은 바로 ‘하나님의 딸과 아들’의 정체성입니다. 다시, 본문의 말씀을 바탕으로 말하자면, 예수님은 포도나무요 우리는 가지라는 말은 예수님과 우리가 한 “몸”이라는 것입니다. 예수님이 포도나무고 그에 붙어 있는 우리가 가지이니, 우리도 곧 “포도나무”인 것입니다. 그렇다면, ‘하나님의 딸과 아들’, 즉 ‘가지’들의 역할은 무엇입니까? 그것은 바로 예수 그리스도처럼 따라 사는 것입니다. 좀 더 정확히 말하자면, 우리 모두는 예수님처럼 그리스도가 되어야 할 것입니다. 그리스도 (Christ)는 그리스어 Χριστός (christos)에서 유래되었습니다. 그 의미는 기름 부음을 받은 자 (anointed one), 히브리어에서는 메시아 (Messiah, מָשִׁיחַ), one who is anointed를 뜻합니다. 예수는 마가복음 1:1에서 자신을 ‘그리스도, 하나님의 아들’ (Christ, the Son of God)로 정의합니다. 그리고 세례요한에 의해 세례를 받으실 때 하늘로부터 하나님의 아들(my Son)이라 불리었습니다. 즉, ‘하나님의 뜻대로 살겠습니다’라고 결단했을 때, ‘하나님의 아들’, ‘기름 부음을 받은 자’로서 그의 사역을 시작하게 된 것입니다. 이러한 예수님처럼 우리도 그리스도 (Christ), ‘하나님의 딸과 아들’이 되어야 할 것입니다. 다시 말해, 우리는 미션 그리스도, 애니 그리스도, 찰스 그리스도, 그리고 (여러분의 이름) 그리스도가 되어야 한다는 말입니다. 누구든지 우리를 볼 때, 우리 안에 그리고 우리를 통하여 예수를 볼 수 있어야 합니다.

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When someone asks us 'who are you?', we commonly introduce ourselves by our personal name, nation, or our position in society. However, our priority identity should be "son of God and daughter of God". The text, "I am the vine, you are the branches" means that Jesus and we are one "body". Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches; so that we are also the "vine". If this is so, what is the role of 'branches' and 'sons and daughters of God'? The role is to live according to Jesus Christ. To be more precise, we all have to be more like Jesus, who is Christ. The word 'Christ' comes from the Greek word 'ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ (christos)'. It means 'anointed one' in Greek and Messiah (מָשִׁיחַ), 'one who is anointed' in Hebrew. In the Gospel of Mark 1:1, Jesus is identified as Christ, the Son of God. In addition, when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, a voice came from the heaven, "You are my Son" (John 1:11). That is when he decided to live according to God's will, he could finally be able to begin his ministry as the Son of God and anointed one. Like Jesus, we should become a true member of Christ's family. In other words, we have to be Mission Christ, Annie Christ, Charles Christ, and (*insert your name*) Christ. Anyone who sees us must be able to see Jesus in us and through us.

가지는 포도나무에 붙어 있을 때, 열매를 맺을 수 있는 통로로서의 역할을 할 수 있습니다. 그리고 그 열매를 통하여 우리가 가지로서 잘 살았는지 알게 됩니다. 여기서 열매의 정의가 필요합니다. 그것은 오늘 본문 말씀이 아닌 15장 중반부의 말씀을 읽다보면 답을 찾을 수 있습니다. 요한복음 15장 10절은 "...내가 내 아버지의 계명을 지켜서, 그 사랑 안에 머물러 있는 것과 같다"고 말씀합니다. 곧, 아버지의 계명을 지키면 그 사랑 안에 머물러 있는 것과 같다고 하십니다. 그리고 그 계명은 바로 예수님이 우리를 사랑한 것 같이 우리도 "서로 사랑하라"는 것입니다 (12, 17절). 하나님의 아들 딸, 그리고 그리스도로서 살면서 다른 이들이 우리를 통해 예수를 볼 수 있는 방법은 바로 "서로 사랑하라"는 것입니다.

When the branch abides in the vine, it can fulfill its role as a bridge that bears fruit. And we know how well we have lived as branches through the fruit. Here, we need the definition of fruit. We can find the answer by reading the middle of chapter 15. Jesus says in John 15:10, "If you keep my [Father's] commandments, you will abide in my love". And the commandment is that as Jesus has loved us, we should "love one another" (vv.12, 17). The only way that we live as 'branches', 'son and daughter of God', and 'Christ', and someone can see Jesus Christ through us is to "LOVE ONE ANOTHER".

때때로 우리는 세상과 사회에서 더 높은 지위와 명예를 갈구합니다. 그리고 높은 지위와 명예를 가진 사람들을 부러워하기도 합니다. 교수, 총장, 박사, 의사, 검사, 변호사, 또는

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힘과 권력을 행사할 수 있는 어떤 자리를 열망합니다. 그리고 우리는 때때로 사람들의 관심과 주목 받는 것에 목말라 합니다. 또 때로는 사람으로부터 대우를 받고 싶어합니다. 그러나 바울은 고린도전서 12:28-31에서, “모두 다 사도이겠습니까? 예언자겠습니까? 선생이겠습니까?”라고 하였습니다. 우리는 모두 다른 역할과 그에 따른 역할을 갖고 있습니다. 그리고 “그보다 더 큰 은사를 사모하라! 가장 좋은 길을 보여주겠다”고 말합니다. 그리고 고전 13:1-3에 바울은 그 무엇을 하더라도 사랑이 없으면 아무것도 아니라고 합니다. 즉, 사랑이 그 무엇보다 더욱 큰 은사이며, 가장 좋은 길인 것입니다 (고전 12:31). 사랑을 하는 일, 그것이 바로 예수 안에 머무는 길입니다. 그것이 바로 가지가 해야 일인 것입니다. 사랑을 할 때, 예수님이 우리 안에, 우리가 예수님 안에 머물 수 있습니다 (요15:10). 사랑을 할 때, 예수님의 기쁨이 우리 안에, 그리고 우리의 기쁨이 넘치게 됩니다 (요 15:11).

Sometimes we desire higher position, honor, or authority in the society and the world. We often envy those who have these positions. We may desire the position of president, doctor, professor, lawyer, and/or any position that is able to exercise a power and authority. We are sometimes thirsty for people's attention and want to be more respected by others. Paul, however, says in 1 Corinthians 12:28-31, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?” We all have different position and role. But Paul says to “strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way”. And he continues to say that if we must do everything in love or it is nothing in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. In other words, love is the greater gift, and the excellent way (1 Cor 12:31). The only way to love one another is to abide in Jesus. That is what the branches should do. When we love one another, we will abide in Jesus' love, and Jesus will abide in us (John 15:10). When we love one another, Jesus' joy may be in us, and our joy may be complete (John 15:11).

그렇다면, 우리는 어떻게 사랑해야 할까요? 사랑의 방법을 보여주는 가장 대표적인 예는 착한 사마리아인의 비유를 들 수 있을 것입니다. 사회에서 지위도 힘도 없던 사마리아인은 그 어떤 레위인, 제사장 보다도 큰 사랑의 마음이 있었습니다. 레위인과 제사장에 비해 사마리아인은 그 당시 사회에서 볼품 없고, 하찮은 부류에 속하는 사람이었습니다. 하지만 그는 하나님의 딸과 아들, 그리고 그리스도의 모습으로 죽어가는 사람을 살렸습니다. 그는 그의 시간, 에너지, 그리고 돈을 써서 할 수 있는 모든 것을 다해 죽어가는 사람에게 꼭 필요한 일을 해 주었습니다. 그의 사랑의 모습은 오늘날 우리 공동체에 많은 의미가 있습니다. 서로 다른 인종과 문화, 성별, 사회적 계급, 그리고 직책에 대한 우리의 편견이 우리를 '가지'답게 살아가지 못하게 할 때가 너무 많습니다. 예수님은 높은 직책, 권력, 힘,

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돈, 그리고 편견으로 인한 욕심과 이기심에서 벗어나, 자신의 몸을 버려 모든 사람을 사랑하셨습니다. 사랑을 행동으로 보이셨습니다. 우리도 예수님처럼 행함과 진실함으로 나 자신, 가족, 친구, 공동체, 그리고 나아가 이웃을 사랑하는 '그리스도', '하나님의 딸과 아들'이 되기를 소망합니다.

Then, how can we love one another? Perhaps, the best example of the way of love may be the story of Good Samaritan. The Samaritan who did not have higher position and social power like Levites and priest had a greater loving mind. The Samaritan was regarded as worthless and more trivial than Levites and priests. However, the Samaritan saved a half-dead person as 'son and daughter of God' and 'Christ'. The Samaritan spent his/her time, energy, and money, which as much as he/she can, in order to give the half-dead person what was really needed. The way in which the Samaritan loves has many suggestions for our community today. We often do not live as the 'branches' because of prejudice that comes from different culture, race/ethnicity, gender, social class, and position. Jesus, the Son of God and Christ, shed the greed and selfishness of higher position, authority, power, money, and prejudice. He sacrificed himself in love for all people. He shows love through action and life. I hope and pray that we may love our family, friends, community, and even our neighbor with action and truth, so that we may be more like Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Amen.

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Week 3

This week, we are reminded to abide in Christ as we focus on Christ through ensuring that we are always connected to Him. Pray about clergy health for those who serve as pastors, chaplains, educators, counselors, and in other fields of service outside of the church.

By the Rev. Ike Nicholson

Main Passage: John 15:1-11

The command:

What are some words or phrases that speak to you? How would you explain “Abide in Me” to a counselor? A construction worker? A nurse? A truckdriver? A police officer? A farmer?

Few people use the word “abide” in everyday language. In all of the works of Shakespeare, the word “abide” is used 47 times. The King James Version of the Bible uses it 103 times, 45 of those times in the New Testament. If it is true that words are ways to help the human mind

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visualize concepts, how did those early Christians understand what Jesus was saying? In the original language of the text, the word translated as "abide" simply means "to stay, remain." The Contemporary English Version translates the word, "joined." That helps, especially given the metaphor Jesus gives us. Jesus calls himself the vine and his disciples the branches. The purpose of the branches is to "bear fruit." It seems reasonable enough that branches that bear fruit are most commonly "joined" to the "vine." This would be a pretty good way to explain to a rural culture the relationship Jesus wants with us, especially to those who tended vineyards.

What about people in other walks of life? Law enforcement and military say, "On me." That means "stay close, your life may depend on it." Tradesman and coaches say, "Stick with me, kid, and you'll learn something." That means, "Pay attention and you, too, can learn this skill." A professional guide tells her hikers, "Don't wander off, you might get lost." "Abide in me," Jesus says. "On me," "stick with me," "don't wander off," our life, our eternal life, depends on it. Our faith, our hope, is in Jesus alone.

The question?

Don't tell me what to do! I'll think about it. Yes Ma'am/Sir.

Where are you on the scale? Jesus doesn't threaten us. He only speaks about the natural result of not heeding his words. Without fruit, the branch is useless to the purpose of the plant. If it doesn't bear fruit, there's something already wrong. The "withering" is not a threat but simply a statement of the natural result of separating ourselves from Jesus. "Abide in me," Jesus says. "But, why?" Jesus' answer is stark. If we don't stay connected to him, we will wither and die. Is my spiritual walk with Jesus withering? Is my community withering? The health of a branch is measured by the fruit it produces.

What a minute. What is "fruit?"

Voices from the past

"As genuine disciples of Jesus, therefore, let us also lift up our eyes and see the fields that have been sown by Moses and the prophets...how it is possible to reap their fruit to eternal life."
Origen (c.184-253), *Commentary on the Gospel of John*

Fruit is a familiar metaphor both in Scripture and in our culture. For the Apostle Paul, the fruit of the Spirit is "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). There's nothing wrong with that, but that doesn't fit the context of Jesus' teaching. This passage in John is a part of the Passion narrative that takes us through the crucifixion and ends with the post-resurrection experiences. In the context of John, what is fruit? John suggests at least two potential meanings of "fruit." First, we are called to love others as we have been loved by Jesus (v. 9). When we "abide" in Christ, we are able to love. Conversely, the absence of love in our lives could be an indicator that we are already "withering." If we love Jesus, we will love others. If we do not love others, we are withering. Second, we are called to

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make disciples. In John 4:36, we read, "The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together." Sounds like John 15:11, doesn't it? If we are not making disciples, if we are not calling others into a relationship with Jesus Christ, we are withering.

Practices:

Jesus gives us clear ways to stay connected when he says, "...my words abide in you" (v. 7a). When Scripture is a regular and significant part of our daily life we are being fed. We will bear fruit. "Ask," (v. 7b) pray expecting that God hears and answers. "Keep my commandments," (v. 9) reminds us of John 13:34. And finally, "that my (Jesus') joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (v. 11) is a testimony of a life centered in the sufficiency and supremacy of Jesus the Messiah.

For a sermon preached on the topic, go to Rev. Nicholson's [blog](#). *Rev. Ike Nicholson is Senior Minister of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Ashland, KY.*

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Week 4

This week, we are reminded to abide in Christ, as we seek to inspire all generations to pursue the cause of justice in the world.

Abiding Across Fear and Difference

By Riley Jones, student, Columbia University

My father always said that fear is simply a gauge of one's capacity to overcome a challenge. As I've gotten older, that has only become clearer. Fear is an emotion that keeps us on our toes while we await whatever may come next. While we all have an instinctual sense of our limits, there are times when those limits—or at least our conception of them—stand in the way of truly basking in the richness of the world God has given us. Instinct tells us to avoid the unknown. God calls us to receive the unknown with his guidance. This is especially true when we are called to embrace other identities, cultures and perspectives that are different our own. Abiding in God's promise in spite of our fear of the unknown requires courage. In the 20th

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Century, Black Americans displayed much of this type of courage. One man, in particular, exemplified this phenomenon very well. He was well-educated, having done graduate work in theology. As pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church he challenged his congregation to be vigilant in the face of a blatantly oppressive system. He even went as far to suggest that Black folks in Montgomery should boycott the segregation of the bus system. No, his name was not Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In fact, Rev. Vernon Johns is a relatively obscure personality in the telling of civil rights history.

Rev. Johns was born in the wake of the Reconstruction era in Virginia. After finishing at Oberlin College, he studied theology at the University of Chicago. When he arrived to the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, he was well received because of his education, but started to ruffle feathers as he settled into his pastoral role. "[The Road to Freedom: The Vernon Johns Story](#)," written and produced by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and James Earl Jones captures this well. A senior deacon at Dexter Avenue had been intent on giving Rev. Johns a hard time because of disagreement with his approach to the question of racial equality. Deacon Hill felt that Rev. Johns was too assertive, perhaps even too dangerous for the well-established congregation to follow him completely. It was, however, after Deacon Hill took the time to listen with an open heart to Rev. Johns reasoning that he was swayed to believe that he too had the power to confront racism. This comes to a climax when Deacon Hill sees the Montgomery Police department abusing its power and decides to confront them, which ultimately results in his death. The sermon that Vernon Johns preaches ([link to sermon clip](#)) in honor of the fallen Deacon Hill is instructive for all of us.

He begins, "Brother Hill found a cause worth dying for. I envy him. Like Moses, he was a peaceful man who saw something that *so horrified him* that he was compelled to act." Deacon Hill channeled his energy, not inwardly to fuel his own cowardice, but rather extended himself to another human being in his time of need.

In Exodus we see Moses struggling with being chosen to deliver his people from Egypt, conversing with God saying, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" And with that simple and profound command, Moses began a journey that delivered the Israelites from their suffering. It was Moses' ability to abide in God's promise which turned his *fear of* into *fear for*. Rev. Johns understood this feeling and called his congregation to act; for that he was removed and cast aside, never to be heard from again. Rev. Johns finishes his sermon by highlighting the lessons to be learned from the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, saying that he "spoke the words that transformed a lynching into a crucifixion, that made Jesus not a condemner but a redeemer. He said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'" For those of us who have the blessings of education and of opportunity, we know our responsibility to speak on behalf of those who need us. Silence in light of the systematic mistreatment of God's children—whatever the form—contravenes our ability to truly abide. Rev. Johns knew this. He did not speak up for his own self-gratification, but rather for those that would come after him. His disruption of the status quo paved the way for a young preacher to start a movement that changed the world. We all have the power to do the

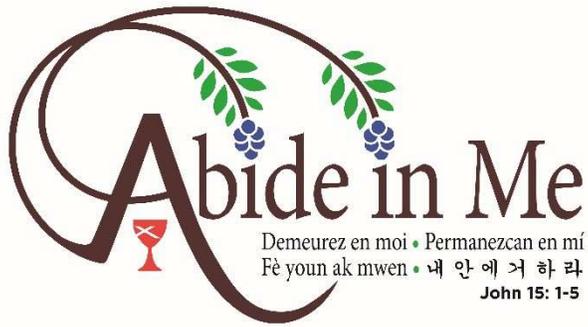
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same.

Questions to Ponder:

1. What horrifies you?
2. What things in our world are so deeply perturbing that they keep us awake at night?
3. What are we afraid of? Who are we afraid for?
4. In viewing the video clip on Vernon Jones, how does he teach us what it means to abide?
5. What does it mean to abide in light of fear? What does it mean to abide despite fear?

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The time is now to ABIDE with one another

By the Rev. Dr. Donald K. Gillett, II

Week 5

This week, we are reminded to abide in Christ, as we seek to inspire all generations to pursue the cause of justice in the world.

The Gilletts at one point had two dogs, a turtle, a fishbowl, a 55-gallon fish tank and four kids all sharing space. Sharing space, making room for others and thinking about the needs of those who inhabit and breathe deeply the air you share is a way of being with others. It is not necessarily a way of abiding with others.

While the act of sharing, the act of giving oneself, can be accomplished in deep and meaningful ways, it does not fully grasp the deeply theological concept of abiding. To “abide” is to enter a relationship through one’s connection and relationship with God. For the believer, Jesus has come and abides with us from the moment of new birth – that moment we believed and confessed Christ as our savior. The Greek word μένει (menē) “to abide” and its derivatives can be conveyed as “to be present, to remain, to

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dwell, to be kept, to tarry, to stand and/or to remain.”

To abide, in my view, is in a theological sense to bring God-Thought, God-Love, and God-Compassion to one’s relationships. In John 15 there are numerous references to the word “abide.”

The meanings range from “to remain,” “to dwell,” “to tarry,” and “to stand.” The structure of the cross reminds me of this abiding relationship. The vertical bar symbolizes God in us and us in God. This is the act of staying, the act of abiding. The horizontal bar symbolizes again the abiding relationship with all of God’s creation-both the believer and the non-believer. Abiding in God-Thought; God-Love; and God-Compassion means to be present, to tarry, to dwell with God and with those who share space with us. We are holding them and their burdens close. They hold us and our burdens as well.

Some may find it difficult to abide when they are the one wronged or demonized by others who profess God’s love. Some may find it difficult to abide when they see someone hurting. Feeling the hurt of others and empathizing with their painful reality creates difficulty.

In this era of dismay, disillusionment, division and despair, it is time not only to share space with those around us; it is time to abide and share God. It is time to peel back the layers of bad theology, spiritual hurt, church pain and learn to abide with one another. It is now time to realize that I cannot truly abide in God and God in me if I choose not to abide with those who suffer, are mistreated, or even disagree with me. It is time to abide. Abiding in Christ and Christ abiding in us produces life changing power. It is time to abide in God, God’s love and one another. God creates more than spaces for us to bear fruit.

Reflection

1. How do you define “abiding”?
2. How are you abiding in the ongoing relationship with God and humanity?
3. In light of the suffering we find in our communities, in what ways can you abide in God-thought; God-Love; and God-Consideration with humanity?
4. In what ways is the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) called to abide in God? Within our respective church? And with others?
5. To abide in God is to worship, and it is displayed through feelings and actions. If I abide in God, God’s word and in God’s Love: What should my outer actions look like?
6. What are three ways to deepen your abiding - relationship with God?
7. How could these thoughts help us to incorporate LIFT into the life of our church?” or something similar.

Rev. Dr. Donald K. Gillett, II is the President of the National Convocation Board of Trustees. He is the senior pastor of East Second Street Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Lexington, KY and the Executive Director of the Kentucky Council of Churches.

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Week 6

This study is a reminder for us to bring the abiding presence of God to others as we share the love of God through evangelism to transform lives and communities.

By Rev. Dr. Cynthia Lindner, University of Chicago Divinity School

During my two decades as an Oregon pastor, a grateful resident of the abundant Willamette Valley, and a novice (though enthusiastic) gardener, I acquired a healthy respect for the exuberant vitality of vines. From the well-disciplined beauty and delectable productivity of the Willamette Valley vineyards, to the morning glory vines that volunteered delicate blue-sky trumpets in places they hadn't been invited, to the wild blackberry vines whose advance was as impossible to halt as their fruit was impossible to resist, the valley's vines were famous not only for their beauty and sweetness, but also for their tenacity and their intransigence.

Perhaps, then, it should come as no surprise that in the midst of dinner on one of the darkest nights of their lives--on the eve of his betrayal, trial, and crucifixion-- Jesus reminds his disciples that they would do well to take a lesson from our verdant partners in creation. When Jesus meets their present crisis by invoking the example of the vines that have delighted and daunted us for generations, he was offering so much more than poetic platitudes or the cheap assurance that all

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would be well, by and by. Jesus wasn't soothing his friends with promises of better days, nor coaching them to cling to the memories of happier times past: in fact, he rejects these familiar refuges of fair-weather faith. Instead, Jesus meets his friends' fear of abandonment and failure with a sturdy assertion of God's power and their own: "Abide in me as I abide in you."

Here, Jesus is not making a suggestion or issuing an invitation; rather, Jesus is proclaiming—that is, he is pro-actively claiming them as his own, as his home, as vital extensions of an indefatigable divine vine. He "abides" in them—that is, his life is their life, his vitality is their vitality, his power is their power, his love is their love. In first century Palestine, the idea that friends and family shared actual life and power in this very visceral way was commonplace. If you shared a meal with someone, accepted his hospitality, ate her bread and drank her wine, then your lives and your loyalty were bound together forever: you had consumed one another's substance, mingled your spirits, and were responsible for each other's welfare. "Abide in me as I abide in you..." wasn't an invitation to climb into Jesus' lap and be comforted. Rather, it was a bracing reminder of who and whose these disciples were, of what they would become, and for whom: "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. "

That Jesus' disciples then and now should "abide" in resurrection's own power—that we, like those verdant, vibrant vines, might sink our roots deep, stretch our branches far, and bear flowers and fruit with courage and tenacity—is our legacy and our true purpose. It is a promise already given; but one that is largely unheeded and unclaimed by the church, even after two thousand years of practice.

We have built "abodes," to be sure—empires and nations, denominations and congregations and buildings—we have secured our own survival and comforted ourselves with all the trappings of faithfulness. But all of our making and doing has not yet plumbed the deep meaning or true power of "abide"—which cannot be exhausted by our beliefs or confined in our buildings, because "abide" is not a noun, but a verb—an exuberant, intransigent, vine-like way of being, growing, living and loving every day. In the first eight verses of John 15, the word "abide" appears eight times, while the words "bear fruit" are repeated six times: the two are integrally connected. "Abiding" is not something we do for, or to, ourselves: "abiding" is living the risen life of Christ in every moment that is ours, in our hearts and homes, our communities and congregations, not for our own benefit or blessedness, but for the sole purpose of bearing fruit for the sake of the world God so loves.

What does it mean to "abide" in our times, to bear fruit for the sake of the world? Perhaps it means getting over ourselves-- embracing the fact that we are not given to the world for our own enrichment, that we are not our own. Perhaps it means rooting ourselves confidently in the power of God's love rather than shrinking in fear from one another. Perhaps it means escaping the pots and plots that have become too small for the vitality and vibrancy of the gospel, opening our church doors not only so that others might enter but that we might "branch out" into our neighborhoods and communities, blooming where we are not expected, reaching into untended lots and hearts with the sweet fruits of human solidarity and heavenly companionship, breaking out the bread and wine of the resurrection life and setting a table for all who cross our paths.

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Questions to ponder:

1. Whose are you, and to whom do you belong?
2. Who or what is your vine, your rootedness, your identity?
3. Where do your power and vitality come from?
4. What does it mean for you to “live Christ’s resurrection life” here and now? What is your community hungry for?
5. What is the fruit you bear on behalf of the world?
6. How could these thoughts help us to incorporate LIFT into the life of our church?” or something similar.

“The time is now to Abide with one another” is a reminder for us to bring the abiding presence of God to others as we share the love of God through outreach and service.