

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer; Amen.

Today I did something that I have only done a handful of times since I have been here at Salem, I asked Marilyn to change the hymn of the day. While I was studying this week and preparing I had one vision of what I would preach on, but as the week progressed, as I prayed over our reading, the thought of abiding really stuck with me, it kept re-appearing in my thoughts.

So today, for our hymn of the day, we will sing one of my all-time favorite hymns, Abide in Me. The hymn, although somewhat sad sounding in melody, offers us hope and security in the promises of Jesus. Hear the words of the first verse. “Abide with me: fast falls the eventide; the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me.” Do you hear the comfort? Do you hear the promise of Jesus? When the world fails, when you have no one else, when darkness is all around you, you always, always have Jesus. He promises us that, that he will show up.

Over my ministry I’ve walked with people who were diagnosed with cancer. I’ve walked alongside of those who suffered from infertility. I’ve walked alongside of those who were in the midst of broken families. I’ve walked alongside of those who had traumatic life events that happened to them. I’ve walked alongside of those who were lonely and depressed and suffering from mental illness. I’ve walked alongside of those who were suffering from financial trouble and job loss. I’ve walked alongside of those who have lost loved ones both expectedly and unexpectedly who were having trouble recovering and moving on. I’ve seen heart break. I’ve seen isolation. I’ve seen loneliness. I’ve pretty much seen it all. And in the midst of those times

of struggle, in those moments of trial, the thought of Jesus abiding inside of me, inside of us seems to make the idea of separation and isolation more tolerable.

When I first read our text for this morning I felt the judgment. I felt the condemnation. It's easy for us to see that if we don't stay connected to the vine, which is of course Jesus, then we will be tossed out, burned, cut off, pruned. It's easy to feel pressure from that verse to produce. To have to do something for us to be connected to Jesus, but if you look closer the last part of the shortest verse included in the gospel lesson, it changes everything. Jesus says, "Abide in me as I abide in you."

What does it mean for us to abide in Jesus, or for that matter for him to abide in us? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary to abide is to tolerate someone or something else, it's to endure someone or something, to wait for someone or something, to accept someone or something without objection, and to conform to someone or something. When you think about those definitions in relationship to our text abiding kind of makes sense. With vines you have to wait for growth and for the harvest. The plant and fruit has to endure the elements. It has to accept what is growing next to it without a voice. And sometimes to conform to the trellis or growth, it has to change.

If we think about that definition in relationship to us and Jesus, abiding in him may seem like a full time job. You can't conform to who Jesus is if you don't know him, so that requires learning and relationship and prayer. It requires us to be patient and wait for answers when we can't see the future or what's in front of us and when we don't know God's will for our lives. It requires us to accept Jesus' as he is, in all his shapes, in forms, in all his earthly actions and reactions, just as he was. And it requires us to conform to him; to the way he acted, to the way he talked, to the way he treated people, to the way he loved and accepted others, to the way he

criticized and condemned, to the way he lived and to the way he died. To abide in Jesus is to become like him. What a big pill to swallow. But it's a command. Jesus doesn't say do it if you feel like it. He says abide in me.

Now...that's not the rest of the story. The rest of that very short verse says, "Abide in me as I abide in you." Yes, I know it's hard to believe, but you heard it right. Just as we abide in Jesus, he also abides in us. So, all of those things that Jesus just asked us to do for him, he also does for us. He spends time with us, getting to know us and learning about us. He is patient; when we listen to him and when we stray from his words. He is even patient with us when we walk away from him and makes bad choices. And yes, Jesus accepts us, in all our shapes and various stages and places in our lives. He accepts us just as we are, flaws and all.

I love that thought, that Jesus knows me. That he is always with me. That he can see into places no one else can see. I love that when the world around me fails, when darkness seems to overtake me, when I feel all alone and scared I can be assured that Jesus abides in me, that I abide in him. I like that promise. It's makes me feel safe and secure. It makes me feel empowered. But sometimes I forget those words, those promises. And I get overwhelmed. And I feel lost. And I feel forsaken.

In those moments it's our job as the church to step in and show others that Jesus is indeed abiding with them. It's our job to walk alongside of them in their trials and tribulations and stand by our brothers and sisters. It's important that when people around us cannot see the light, that we who have Jesus abiding in us, it's important that we be that light for others. It's what we do as the church, as Christian people. It's how we show Jesus love, by abiding in Jesus...by acting the way that he acts, by conforming to his ways and living by his example. It's not always easy, but it's what Jesus commands of us. Abide in me as I abide in you.

I know we aren't perfect. We have flaws. We all fall far short of God's glory. But the good news is Jesus promises to love us anyway. And as our hymn for today says, "When other helpers fail and comforts flee, help of the helpless, O abide with me." No matter what this world brings, no matter who fails us, we always, always have Jesus. Thanks be to God. Amen.