



Sixth Sunday of Easter

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

Ern Warner

Acts 10:44-48

1 John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17

Psalm 98

O Lord, grant us the gift of your Holy Spirit that we, loving you in all things and above all things, can make known your promises to all the world. Amen

The words abide and love appeared repeatedly in our liturgical readings in recent weeks. Perhaps we might explore them a little more today. The word abide appears often in the 1st Epistle of John and the Gospel of John. Last week, we heard Reverend Mary tell us that the Grecian word for abide is meno. In researching this I also found 11 variants, all expressing subtle nuances--such as to remain, to dwell, to persevere, to surrender, to await, to endure, and so on. Perhaps the most common meaning of meno might be to remain with. I thought about how to express what this might mean and, for a simple example, I thought of my cat. When there is a patch of sunlight on the floor, the cat will most often be found "abiding" in it. And when that patch of sunlight moves across the floor, the cat seems to magically move with it, as I seldom see any deliberate action on the cat's part to remain in the sunlight. The cat abides where it finds warmth and comfort. It is as if the sunlight draws the cat along, much as our love can draw us along.

Jesus also gives us some hints about how to abide in his 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."* So we can see that abiding doesn't mean only resting in, or dwelling in, it also requires us to take action in keeping the commandments of God as revealed to us through Jesus. The sunlight may magically move my cat across the floor, but we will need to make a conscious effort to abide in the love of God in Christ. As I grow in years, I find remembering things I should do, such as proper social etiquette, a little challenging, so I look for the simplest way to accomplish this. It can sometimes be difficult to recall the proper response in surprising situations. But elsewhere, in the 1st Epistle of John, it reads *"God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them."* In its purest simplicity is our commandment then to love? And what is this love?

The world is certainly a challenging place today for one who tries to be centered in love, as many events in our world and community challenge our ability to abide in God's love. Last Wednesday, our book group discussed a chapter titled "Charity." And we found out that the word charity, in earlier times, did not mean how charity is commonly envisioned today. Charity, in earlier times and in the writings from those times meant love, not merely giving to the poor. It was regarded as the highest form of love, love such as the Grecian word agape is meant to express. The distinguishing marks of charity are it is selfless and does not seek personal advantage nor fear personal loss. It is tranquil, a steady will to conform to the divine will on every level of existence. And it is humble, realizing that the same weaknesses and

faults in others also lie within ourselves--if we can transcend them in our movement of love towards God, perhaps other people can also. Can we help to lift others by the examples we set, or do we judge them and, in doing so, keep from them the good that we could bring them and forfeit the good we might gain for ourselves?

The chapter also contained a quote from St Bernard of Clairvaux. *“Love seeks no cause beyond itself and no fruit; It is its own enjoyment. I love because I love; I love in order that I may love.”* That is probably not a statement that comes across clearly in an initial reading; what St. Bernard points out is that love is complete in itself. In another section of the chapter, a writer asks the Bishop of Geneva what he must do to attain perfection and the Bishop answers you must love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself. The writer then asks, *“How do I attain this love?”* After going back and forth a bit, the Bishop finally replies *“There are many besides you who want me to tell them of methods and systems and secret ways of becoming perfect. And I can only tell them that the sole secret is a hearty love of God. And the only way of attaining that love is by loving. You learn to speak by speaking, to study by studying, to run by running, to work by working; and just so you learn to love God and man by loving.”*

Here is one of the values of our community. We are not all alike, we have different tastes and temperaments, and we may even vote for different people in the elections. Our ability to love each other fully has to transcend our differences and embrace our similarities. I have a particular fondness for visual images--I'm not sure everybody else shares that same taste--so please bear with me. At a recent meeting, I remarked on how our church community might be envisioned as being similar to a rock polisher. A rock polisher is a rotary drum in which you place rocks, grit, and water. As the drum turns during the polishing process, the rocks “work” with each other, the grit, and the water to wear away their sharp edges, eventually becoming smooth and polished. That grit could be the gospel teachings and our liturgies, the water, our waters of baptism, and the turning of the drum our gathering together for worship and fellowship. All the activities of our church community bring us together so that we can practice learning to love by loving. If we can begin to abide in this love, then we can carry it into our larger community. There we will find people who will challenge us, and make it difficult for us to remain in God's love. Perhaps we can think of them as having the same difficulties we have experienced, or even worse, and allow them the chance to transcend those difficulties and grow into a center of love.

Mahatma Gandhi wrote that we should be the change we want to see in the world. If we want to see a loving world, we must emulate that love. We must bear witness to that love in our lives and our actions. Today in our community we celebrate a baptism, renewing the baptismal covenant of our faith. It is a blessing that we have this community to welcome others into God's love, to guide us in the love of Christ and each other, and to welcome us back if we stray from that path of love. Gregory of Nyssa wrote, *“For this is truly perfection: never to stop growing towards what is better and never placing any limit on perfection”* So we persist in learning to love by loving each other, to be Christ-like by abiding in the love of God, and in doing so, become the change that we want to see in the world. Amen