

The Lord's Message: Abide in Christ

Date: May 22, 2022

Where: Tilghman United Methodist Church

Scripture Reference: John 15: 1-8

Last week, we learned about the Awkward Commandment. Anybody recall what the Awkward Commandment is? To love God and love each other. The word love has many different meanings. The Greek word for the meaning of love in this commandment is "Agape." Agape love is the highest and purest form of love. This love is a love that is willing to sacrifice what we want in exchange for what God wants. When we are obedient to the commandment in this love, we produce what the Bible calls "fruit." This week, I hope that we are going to learn that we need to remain, or abide, in Christ in order to produce this fruit. We can not produce it on our own. We need Jesus to remain, or abide, in us in order for this to occur.

Let us pray.

With your Bibles open this morning, we are going to plunge right into John 15. Let me give you just a little background for this chapter. Jesus is having a last meal with His disciples before He is to be arrested, tried, sentence and crucified. Jesus has gotten up from the meal and washed all of the disciples' feet, including Judas who was about to betray Him. Jesus has told them in **John 13:12-17**. Jesus then goes on to tell the disciples, that one of them is going to betray them. Judas leaves the meal after Jesus has dipped the bread into a dish to carry out his plan to betray Jesus. Jesus then has a long discourse with His disciples. John 15 is part of this discourse.

Jesus starts off John 15 with an analogy of a grape vine and our relationship with God. Grape vines were found throughout Israel at the time of Jesus. Drinking wine was preferred over drinking water, because most water was contaminated. Grape vines today are found throughout Israel. Grape vines would have been very familiar to the disciples.

In verse 1, Jesus says that He is the vine and God is the gardener, or vine dresser. In the beginning of verse 2, the first act that the gardener, or vine dresser, does is to remove the dead or dying branches. These are the branches that are not capable of producing any fruit, because they have been broken away from the main vine. These are the people that have wandered away from the Lord. They no longer have a relationship with God. They are in a sad state of affairs. The writer of **2 Peter 2: 20-22** warns us about falling away. The Good News for us, compared to the dead branch, is that we can return to the Lord. The dead branch can never live again.

At the end of verse 2, the second action of the gardener, or vine dresser, is to prune the branches of excess leaves, so that the branch can produce abundant fruit. Too many leaves cause the fruit to not ripen properly and to rot. What in our lives needs to be pruned? Anything that doesn't contribute to the purpose of fulfilling the awkward commandment of loving God and loving each other. This could be stuff that wastes our time. Taking a break from the internet, Facebook or TV. Spending the time more with family and friends. This could also be taking a look at relationships that rob our time. This could be past or present relationships that continue to drain us. Spending more time with God, our family, and close friends that support and nurture us and not bring us down. It could also mean looking at our attitudes. Do we grumble or complain too often? Do we fly off the handle at everything that upsets us? This pruning can be difficult and painful, but it is necessary.

Now verse 4 tells us that it is absolutely essential that we stay connected to the vine, that we stay connected to Jesus. The King James translation for the word remain is abide. The word "abide," means to continue in a place or to continue in a relationship. To Abide in Christ means to continue in a relationship with Jesus. This means more than just coming to church. It means more than just praying to God. It means more than just reading your Bible. It means spending time with Jesus. It means staying connected to God through meaningful Bible Study and prayer. It means being rooted and grounded in God's love so nothing can shake us.

This relationship with God brings about the fruit of Agape love for God and others. Verse 5, says we cannot produce this fruit on our own. We have to abide in Christ in order to produce this Agape love.

Verse 6 warns us again to not to fall away. Paul tells us in **Philippians 3:13-14** to keep our eyes focused on God. We need to let go of the past. We can not change the past. We can only change the present and the future. By keeping our focus on God, then we will have a fuller, richer, and more abundant life in Christ. We need to totally surrender our lives to Him.

This idea of abiding in Christ reminds me of a story that I heard. This older couple, husband and wife, are driving down the road. The husband is driving and the wife is sitting in the passenger seat. They pull up to a traffic light. The car in front of them has a younger man and woman. The man is in the driving seat, but the woman is cuddled up next to the man. The man's right arm is around the woman. The husband and wife see this. The wife says to her husband, "remember when we used to do that." The husband replies, "well I am still sitting where I have always been. You are the one that moved away from me." Maybe you are here today and you are the one that has moved away from Jesus. Maybe there is so much that is hindering you from getting close to Jesus. Maybe you have to allow God to do some pruning in your life in order for you to snuggle up to Jesus. I want you to take this week and examine your life. What do you need to have God prune from your life so that you can Abide in Christ?

In verses 7 & 8, God wants us to bear much fruit, the fruit of Agape Love, of loving God, and loving others. Let us Abide in Christ. Amen.