

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Easter 5, Series B  
Saturday, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021  
Sunday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

Sermon: Abide  
Texts: John 15:1-8

Focus: Jesus is our life.

Function: That they would remain connected to Jesus and his Word.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: “That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom...” (SC, 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of Apostles’ Creed).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen. Alleluia! Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed.*

*Alleluia!* “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me” (John 15:4, ESV).<sup>1</sup> Abide. What a strange commandment (or invitation?). Abide. Ten times in John 15, Jesus says to abide. Abide, abide, abide, abide, abide, abide, abide, abide. And, in case you didn’t hear it that ninth time: *abide!*

Yet what does it mean to *abide* in Jesus? In the (in)famous cult classic film, *The Big Lebowski* (1998), Jeff Bridges portrays “the Dude,” an incurable slacker in a bathrobe, who drinks, smokes, and goes

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

bowling every day—and that’s about it. At one point somebody asks what the Dude does all day. The answer: “The Dude abides.” The Dude abides. But I don’t think that’s the same idea Jesus has in mind in our Gospel lesson.

*Abide* is a hugely significant word in the New Testament, occurring 112 times, more than half of which are in the Gospel and letters of John. For example, in today’s epistle, we read, “God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 John 4:16b). To abide means to remain and to stick it out—to stick together, to remain *connected*. Something that abides is here and it remains. If it abides, it does come and go. In fact, it doesn’t go anywhere. It just stays put.

Jesus wants to abide in us. He wants to remain in us and stay connected. He wants to be with you and stay with you forever. He doesn’t come and go. He isn’t going anywhere. You can rely and depend upon Jesus to do what he says and be who he is. Jesus wants to abide in you, and he earnestly seeks that you should abide in him.

Chad Bird is a former pastor and writer who blogs a lot about theology. On a recent Facebook post, Bird writes, “To abide in Christ is to stay where he has put us: in his body by baptism, in his church by the word, in his Spirit by the gospel. Any other place is death and darkness.”<sup>2</sup> Abiding in Jesus means to show up and remain where he promises to be: his Word, the water in Baptism, the bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Altar, and the fellowship of the saints. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them” (Matt. 18:20).

Jesus Christ is the True Vine. Because he died and rose again, he gives eternal life to all who abide in his love and his Word. He wants us to find our life in him, just as the branch finds its life in the vine. Without connection, the branch cannot fulfill its purpose of producing fruit. It dies and falls off. Or it is cut off and burned. But Jesus wants us to *thrive*. When we abide in him, his love, his Spirit, his Word, and

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<sup>2</sup> Chad Bird, comment on Facebook post, 29 April 2021.

his life flow freely through us like sap in the vine or blood in the body.

*Everything* depends upon being connected to Jesus by faith in his Word.

Yet as crazy as it sounds, our sinful nature seeks separation and not connection. Sin is rebellion against God's commands and causes separation from him. We don't want to remain in the vine because we think too highly of ourselves. We think that *we* are responsible for the fruit. We think that *we* are ones who get things done and make miracles happen. We want to break away from the vine and go our wind-tossed way, seeking out adventures and endeavors that only lead to death. We want the glory and the credit for everything good in our life. We forget, ignore, or resent the reality that it all comes from Christ.

Chad Bird writes about this in his book, *Your God Is Too*

*Glorious:*

“Doing nothing is the hardest thing for us to do. We'd rather talk nonstop for hours than be utterly silent for a few minutes. We'd rather be told to plan this, accomplish that, busy ourselves with these goals, than simply to receive the work the Lord does for us. It all seems too easy. Too childish. Too much like we have no part to play in our own defense, recovery, and ultimate salvation. But we don't.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Chad Bird, *Your God Is Too Glorious: Finding God in the Most Unexpected Places* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 97.

As we sing in the old Gospel hymn: “Jesus paid it all/all to Him I owe.”

When we try to live apart from Jesus, we do not stay in the places where he promises to be: his Word, his Sacraments, and his Church. We read the Bible when we can “fit it in,” but our calendars are so full and our to do lists so long, that we rarely carve out quiet time for devotion. Instead of a day born out of prayer, we only pray to God as a matter of last resort when things really hit the fan. We fail to show up for public worship because we have supposedly better, more exciting things to do. Why do we need to go to church anyway? We can just watch the worship service on YouTube. But watching on YouTube and actually participating in worship are two very different things. You cannot receive the Lord’s Supper through a television screen (although I have heard of some pastors telling their parishioners at home to lift up bread and wine towards the TV screen for consecration). When we do not avail ourselves to receive God’s Word and Sacraments and be “stay where he puts us” (Bird), then we cut ourselves off from our life source. Then we wither and die.

We live in the illusion that we are self-sufficient, that we are the heroes of our own stories, that it's up to us to make things happen. But Jesus tells us otherwise. "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Unless we abide in Jesus, unless we stay connected to him, we can do nothing. We bear no fruit. We accomplish naught. We are complete and utter failures. A branch by itself is worthless. It cannot produce grapes. Without the water and nutrients that come from the sap of the main vine, the branch dies.

If our life is not found in Christ, then, even worse than being unfruitful, we will become fuel for the fire. "If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:6). Jesus doesn't specify here what the fire represents, but from his parables in the other gospels, we can be certain that it means eternal damnation in the fires of hell.

I don't want to die—temporally or eternally. I don't want to merely survive. I want to *thrive*! I want to enjoy a life full of everything Jesus wants for me: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. I want an

abundant life—life to the full! And the only place or person in which I will ever find that refreshment and fulfillment is in Jesus Christ.

As wonderful as they may be, our relationships with other people, our work, and our hobbies and interests will never be the source of meaning and purpose in life. We find our life in Jesus. “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my life” (John 15:9). Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. Our true life is found only in the life of the one who died and rose again for us. We need to stay connected to Jesus. Abide in Jesus. Abide in his Word and his love, because he already abides in you. Alleluia! Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*