

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

There are occasions we gather for an evening service and we sing that beautiful hymn “Abide with Me” by Henry Lyte and William Monk. Evening services can leave our hearts, our hurts and our gladness right on the surface of our being. I know I feel this way when we sing

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, oh, abide with me.

We look in the gathering dusk for help and comfort as only the helpless and comfortless can look, and sometimes in our weakness we wonder if God indeed abides with us.

In our gospel this morning, Jesus tells us “Abide in me as I abide in you.” The Greek word *meno* is what we translate as “abide”, and it means more than just “abide”, it also means “remain” or “stay” even “live, dwell, last and endure”. It has the sense of having a home, remaining, staying and abiding, all those things as one.

Jesus tells “Abide in me as I abide in you” meaning he has made his home with us, and he invites us to make our home with him.” In the 21st chapter of the book of Revelation (v 3) John tells us “See the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.” (NRSV)

A sense of home, of remaining, of belonging is important for all of us, it’s right up there in the basic needs of people everywhere who want to feel, to know, that there is always a place where they will be welcome, comfortable and comforted, a place of safety and refuge from the burdens of the world, of life, restlessness. Think of Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz saying over and over “There’s no place like home” or sayings like “home is where they always have to take you in.” We long to belong and home is the longing of our hearts.

Unfortunately for some, the idea of home as a secure, safe and welcoming place is an illusion, one that dims either suddenly or over time. But the home Jesus makes in us is no illusion, it’s not mere sentiment or a pithy thought that has no reality. It is instead the absolute promise of a home that is life itself, it’s safe, inviting, caring, a place of growth, safety and welcoming.

Jesus makes his home with us, in us, and we can deal with the terrors of the world and of broken homes, Jesus in us and us abiding in Jesus, and the helpless, vulnerable, frightened and broken, the fragile know that true life, eternal life, is ours even now, it’s a real home.

The image Jesus gives us in our gospel is that of home as a living, growing thing, an intertwined grapevine. Having lived in Northern California for over twenty years I have seen many grapevines, bearing much fruit, and this image of the grapevine, root and vine, branches going off in many directions, conveys our life in Jesus and Jesus is in us as fruitful beyond all our imagination. And Jesus is the life-giving vine, and you are attached to him so take a chance brothers and sisters, take a chance!

Grow multiple, exotic, diverse fruits, stretch yourself out across the vine, see how you can grow! This is our life in Jesus, our life together, this is our home with Jesus in us giving the growth, growing in grace bearing fruit for the healing of our brothers and sisters everywhere!

“Abide in me as I abide in you,” Jesus says, “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.” Gathered together in an evening service we the vulnerable and helpless, we pray that God would abide with us and we have our answer even as we sing

I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grace, thy victory?
I triumph still, if thou abide with me!

Jesus abides in us, and we in him, we are home!

AMEN