

Sermon Easter 5 2018

April 29, 2018

John 15:1-8

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read, especially these words, **“Abide in me, and I in you.”**

This morning I’d like to start with a quote from an early Church Father by the name of Ignatius of Antioch. Now this Ignatius lived in the first century and is believed to have died around the year 108 A.D. This puts him in the time of the church just after Jesus, and in fact tradition says that he was even a disciple of John the Apostle. Hear Ignatius’ words: *“See that ye all follow the bishop, even as Jesus Christ does the Father, and the presbytery as ye would the apostles.... Let no man do anything connected with the Church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”* As you heard those words now you might be wondering why I chose them. He said that you should follow the bishop and listen to the presbytery and you might be wondering what he even means by that. He means pastors—which by the way I didn’t choose this to point out that he tells the people to follow these pastors. No, I picked these words because of the conclusion: “Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church,” or as we would say it “there is the Christian Church.” In other words, I picked this because he basically said, “Where Jesus is, there is the Church.” You want to know where to find the Church? Find Jesus. You want to find Jesus? Find the Church.

So why the length of the quote? Where was he pointing people to Jesus? Did you catch that? Where should be people be? Where the bishop, the pastor is. Why? Is it because the pastor is so great? Is it because he is super-holy and his holiness can rub off on people? No. Why is it? The Eucharist. The Lord’s Supper. Because what happens there? Jesus comes. To say it another way, “where the pastor is celebrating the Divine Service, the people should be, even as wherever Jesus is, there is the Church.” Jesus is at the Lord’s Supper so the people should be there.

Do you see the connection to our text? **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. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.** Abide in me, and I in you.

So, where does Jesus abide? After all, this is an important question to consider, isn’t it? Jesus is serious about this, about being with Him. Apart from Him you can do nothing. Apart

from Him you are that branch that has fallen off of the vine and you are going to wither and die. So where is He that you may abide with Him?

I know I've asked this question before, it's one I ask a lot, but where is Jesus? Most often people will tell me, "everywhere?" Is that true? You bet! Paul says so. He says that Jesus has gone up to heaven and that He now fills all things. He's everywhere. But does that do you any good to know Jesus is everywhere when you're looking everywhere for Him but instead you see your loved one diagnosed with cancer? Where is Jesus then? How can you know that this Jesus who is everywhere really loves you? Really loves your loved one? How can you that this Jesus is good? From what you see, you can't, can you? In that moment you have to fall back on your faith that He is good. And how does faith know? Because of His Word. So where is Jesus? He is in His Word.

As an analogy that compares well, think about water. Where can you find water? You can find it everywhere, can't you? You know that, right? That there is always some level of water vapor in the air? Think about that. There is always water around you to some extent or another. But where do you go when you're thirsty? Can you just suck that water out of the air and have your thirst satisfied? No! Where do you have to go? To a spring, right? To a sink, to a water fountain. You have to go somewhere where the water is collected.

In fact, think about this as well: can you just go drink water from any source where you find it collected? Well I suppose you can, but what happens sometimes? Sometimes it can make you sick. You can drink it out of a lake, but it might have something in it tainting it. So where is your best bet? To get it somewhere where it has been purified.

So where do you get Jesus? Where does He abide? In His Word. But think about what that Word says. Does it tell you to just sit at home and read it? And as I say that, I want to be clear. Does it tell you to JUST sit at home and read it? Does it tell you that you abiding with Jesus is just you and your Bible? No. What does it say? It says, **"How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching. And how are they to preach unless they are sent?... So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."** In other words, it says your faith is fed by hearing someone sent—called and ordained—to preach that Word. Is it good for you to read your Bible? Yes! Read it! That is the very word spoken from the mouth of God! That is the Word that Paul tells us God-breathed, inspired; the Word with the Spirit of God in it. But hear it preached as well.

You can even see that in the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch. Here was the Eunuch, reading the book of Isaiah, notably reading it aloud—by the way, something that can sometimes be helpful—but reading it aloud, and Phillip comes and asks him if he understands. And what does the Eunuch say? **"How can I, unless someone guides me?"** So hear the Word by a man called to preach it. In, Jesus even says of preachers, **"He who hears you hears me."**

When you hear that preaching you hear Jesus. That means Jesus is there. **Abide in me, and I in you.**

And where else does the Word say Jesus is? In baptism. **You were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, you too walk in newness of life.** In baptism you were buried with Jesus. He's there in those waters. He's in those waters because the Word is there.

And to tie back to the quote from the beginning, where is Jesus? In His holy Supper, because of His Word attached to the bread and wine. **Abide in me, and I in you. Apart from me you can do nothing.**

Now as I say all of this, I think it's important for us to hear again and again and again. I think it's important because we can turn the faith into something that's just about head knowledge. The Lutheran Confessions call this "an intellectual assent" to what Jesus has done. In other words, we think that faith is just knowing the right stuff, and that's all there is to it. Christians, faith is much different from knowledge. Faith isn't just answering the right questions on the test. It's truly trusting in this Word and what it says, that the promises are real.

As I say this, something I had in mind as I was preparing this week was from a Facebook post I saw from a fellow pastor. He linked on that post a video which discussed some poll results regarding Millennials. The poll indicated that 39 percent of Millennials say that they are not in church, instead they "find God elsewhere." The interpretation of this was to say that they saw no need to be in church because, in terms of what happens on Sunday morning, they can find better. They can find better preaching. They can find better music. They can find all of this in a way that's more engaging, if they even want it in the first place. And they can find it in the comfort of their own home on the internet. So what do we do with that?

The suggestions in the video were that perhaps we change this from strictly preaching to something more interactive. Or that we focus on other wants that Millennials have. But what other options are there? There is the option of drawing people to the spring rather than the water vapor. To pointing to where Jesus promises to be in a way that's accessible. Or think about it in this way. When Jesus came to us in His first coming, how did He come? Did He just come as a spirit? Did He just float around with His disciples? No. In fact, when you see John saying, "**every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist,**" what he is saying that those who said that Jesus didn't actually come in the flesh were opposed to Christ. In fact they came to be called gnostics, people who thought Jesus came only to give us a special *gnosis*, "knowledge," for salvation. Jesus didn't come just for knowledge. He didn't just come as a spirit. No, He was incarnate, in the flesh for you. He was embodied. And now His body is visible here. In the Church, gathered as He comes. It is

gathered where He promises to be, even in His flesh and blood for you; for the forgiveness of your sins. Here where there is the spring attached the well of what He won for you on the cross, dying for your sins, giving you life in His resurrection. **Abide in me, and I in you.**

Now as I say all of this, I understand I am preaching to the choir. You all are here. As we think about this I would encourage you to consider how this, how faith connects to church attendance. To start, are we saved by the act of being in church? No! But faith knows it cannot sustain itself apart from the body of Christ, apart from the presence of the vine. So think about that for yourself. Are you trusting that your faith is strong enough not to have to be where the Word is preached, where the body and blood of Jesus are? Then your faith isn't in Jesus, it's in your faith. So that's something to consider.

The other is this. I know that as I speak of this, we all have family members and friends who fall into this category. And this saddens us. In light of that sadness, it's easy for us blame ourselves. This is especially true as parents. Right now, I have it easy. My kids are under my roof and they have to come with me Sunday in and Sunday out. When we go on vacation they have to ride in the car forty minutes to the closest Missouri Synod Church so that when I have a Sunday off I actually get to sit in the pew and hear preaching that is Scriptural. But when they grow up that will be out of my hands. Many of you know that. And if your kids don't go to church, it's easy to blame yourself and feel guilt. The reality is this: could you have done something to teach them the faith better? Of course, you always could. If there's anything the Law teaches us, it's that we always, always, always fall short. That even goes for pastors. There are ways that I don't teach my children as faithfully as I should. Ways I don't give the best example, ways I teach them to sin, ways that, as Jesus said, it would be better for me to have a millstone hung around my neck and I be cast in the sea. But Christians, the reality is your children are sinners, and they are sinners with their own sinful will. Any shortcoming you had Jesus can easily make up for, so where you have fallen short you have to receive the mercy of Christ for yourself in that regard. Should you repent for where you could have been better? Of course. Always. But also know that the blood of Christ covers over that sin. **That He has who has overcome the world is greater than the world.**

So, where is your hope? In Jesus. **Abide in me, and I in you.** Your hope in falling short as a parent is in Jesus. Your hope if you're not a parent is in Jesus. Your hope if you are merely a child who doesn't see the depth of your sin is in Jesus. **Abide in me, and I in you.** And where is Jesus? Everywhere, yes, but specifically where the Church is. As Luther says, "*In this Christian Church, He daily and richly forgives my sins and the sins of all believers.*" Where is the hope of the world? In Jesus. **Abide in me, and I in you.** Or as Ignatius said, "Where Christ is, there is the Church." Abide in the Word, abide in His baptism. Abide in His body and blood. Abide in Him, and Christians, you have no doubt He abides in you. **Abide in me, and I in you.** Amen.