

Abide in My Love
John 15:9-17
Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Alleluia! Christ is risen! [Response: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] In Jesus' Name. Amen. Last week we studied and received into our hearts the magnificent Gospel from the first part of John 15: Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. In that Gospel He commanded: "Abide in me." The Lord is looking out for you dear Christian in revealing to you how to remain in life, not death; in the peace of God that He has won for you, not alienation and separation from the God of peace. And while we had a clue last week in terms of the signs that we do indeed abide – remain with and in – Jesus Christ namely, 1) His **words** remain in us (His life-giving teaching, most especially that you are cleansed and continue to be cleaned or pruned); and 2) The fruit, **more** fruit (15:2), and **much** fruit (15:5, the good works that God has prepared in advance for you to do), there is more to be said. We certainly praise God for these great signs and assurances...these are indeed great consolations that you abide in Christ the Life of the World. These are signs that the peace of God is in your life. We need such signs along the way, because life is very hard.

This past week I was in the hospital with one of our members who was anxious about her upcoming surgery so I shared with her Isaiah 26:3: "You keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." Going into the surgery, I compared our anxiety to the winds and waves that buffeted the disciples on the boat when they saw Jesus walking on water (Matthew 14:22f.), but when Peter had his mind and eyes stayed on Christ nothing else mattered. His fear from the wind and waves was canceled out and indeed for a short time, even Peter walked on water. The great encouragement though continues: even when in our sin we take our mind and eyes off of Christ and permit ourselves to be driven by the restless wind and waves of the world again (when the devil seeks to sift us like wheat), and we begin to sink, what did the Lord do? He rescued Peter and pulled him back up. So keep your mind and heart on Christ and if you begin to sink, know that the One who died and rose for you will lift you back up and then keep your mind and heart upon Him again (and this cycle of grace continues).

But our Lord Jesus loves us so much that He elaborates on this cycle of grace. He does not want you to be ambiguous or unclear about how you remain united with and connected to Him. We need to know this dear Christians. How easy it is for us to feel that God is far away and to feel as though we have no idea as to how to abide in Christ, to remain in His life for us.

He has won for you His peace. His blood covers your sins. God the Father now sees you as a forgiven and holy one in His Son: you have peace with God! We want desperately, however, to remain in this peace. We want desperately to remain in Christ our Savior.

This makes sense because our sin makes us insecure. It raises the worst doubts in us and tries to convince us that we are unable to go on. That is our sin is daily trying to pull us away from abiding in Christ and needless to say this is the goal of the evil one. So Christ your Savior pulls you close to Himself and says with the most compassionate love and mercy, "Abide in me." But then our sin, the world, and the devil grab our attention and tries to yank us out of the Savior's arms. This "tug of war" is the normal Christian life, so needless to say we need

additional resources, more ammo in this battle, more encouragement, and great clarity about how we are going to in fact abide in our Savior so that we never leave Him; so that we are never pulled away from Him! This is what our Gospel today is for.

So Jesus continues His teaching for your great security and what he is doing is giving you a fortress of security. Going into John 15 the Lord had already assured you of peace. How is it that the Lord would even approach me, a terrible sinner? It is because He has brought peace through His blood. His blood covers your sins. Now you have peace. So in John 14:27 the Lord says:

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

This is the impetus behind knowing that the Lord gladly holds you with your warts and all; with your doubts and all of your struggles. In spite of these and by covering these with His blood, you have peace with God, but He knows that you should have even more assurance in your abiding in Him. So in what follows from today's Gospel in John 15:9-17...

1. Your peace is complemented with...
2. Love which is further complemented with...
3. Joy

Not just any love or joy mind you, but with a very specific love and a very specific joy. This is what our Gospel is about. And be clear, these give answer to, "Exactly how do I know that I abide in Christ?" Again we already know that this is partially answered through His words that abide in you and through the fruit, more fruit, and much fruit, but we need more and so He gives you more. He wants you to be confident in your faith Christian!

I hope you take this the right way. The sinful skeptic wants to criticize what has been said thus far, "What's the matter, does God have trouble getting it right?" Don't go there. There are actually good reasons as to why the Lord goes this extra step for us. Our good works – while being a sign of our abiding in Christ – can never be the basis for our abiding in Christ. We compromise our confidence regarding our good works, because how often we do other works that seem to cancel the good that we do? On top of that even our good works are grossly tainted with sin and in the end, in themselves, are as unclean rags. (Is 64:6) Furthermore, the words of our Lord are certainly efficacious and produce faith...we are to rejoice that His words abide in us, but how often we look away from His words and listen to other words...the words of our flesh which lure us not to live for God, but self; the words of the world which lure us to deeply desire things that will turn to dust; and the words of the devil which lure us to seek the things of pride and power...in our sin we permit words of death to cover the words of life.

These impact our peace. These make us restless. And when that happens, we doubt.

This is why our Lord takes the next step.

1. Not just His peace, but
2. His love, and not just His love, but
3. His joy

Why are these so important? Because dear Christian these put you in the life of Christ itself. The love and joy of the Lord will not permit us to be bystanders to the faith. The love and joy of the Lord will not permit us to treat the faith as this theoretical thing to be thought about and merely analyzed on a comfortable rocker on our front porch as we sip tea or lemonade. The peace of God and the actual presence of our Savior through His Word and Sacrament compel us to live. To be people of action who know the Lord's action in and through us...our faith must be active; it can't help but be and when this happens the Lord takes away time from the skeptic; takes away the doubt from the casual observer, because the casual observer is transformed into an active doer. His or her peace is extended through love and joy.

Pastors conduct their work – preaching, teaching, visitation, counsel, evangelism, administration – they have their work like you have yours. There are times when you are happy in your work and feel energized to do it, but there are other times when you struggle and when you are tired. Going into evening appointments can be challenging this way after a long day. When our congregation was in Laguna Beach we had attached to our ministry the servicing of a Good Shepherd Lutheran Home in which it was the pastor's duty to visit on a regular basis. The Lord sent me to visit these Christians with disabilities. On many occasions I feel as if my mind was full of His peace, being reminded of the things of the ministry (perhaps having spent the day writing a sermon and meditating on His Word), but the translation as I drove to the Lutheran Home and walked up to the door was not always so impressive. Sometimes it was drudgery, sinfully imagining that I had to effect renewed energy to make myself more effective for these with mental disadvantages. What was the Lord doing? He was putting me in the position to love and to be loved. I would walk through the door and these precious brothers and sisters in Christ would take over – and I'm convinced that it was the Holy Spirit taking over – they loved me and shared the love of Christ with me. Love took over. We were not loving each other “because we had to” as if this were some good work to earn God's favor, but we were swept away by the life of Jesus. The things of love took over and when I left – and I cannot think of a single time when this was not true – I felt uplifted. God had not permitted my faith to be a mere theory, but He put me into an arena of love.

Love gets us busy in the faith. Love is the translation and application of our faith. And it is a great protector of our faith and it testifies according to Jesus Himself that we continue to abide in Him, but I need to make sure that I'm being clear.

When our Lord elaborates on “abide in me” (from last Sunday on the vine and branches) by saying now “abide in my love” (this Sunday's Gospel from John 15:9) He is not first of all speaking of your love or our love, but first things first: He is speaking of His love for you. You want to abide in Christ and remain in the saving faith with great confidence? Then abide in the love that Christ has for you dear Christian. Jesus loves you!

And our Lord makes a comparison:

1. As the Father loves Him (Jesus).
2. Jesus loves you.

This is mind-boggling and absolutely true. How much does the Father love the Son? Are we able to even begin to describe such amazing love? Do human words even permit the possibility of our describing such love? At John 3:35 the Word says:

³⁵ The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.

The Father loves the Son so much that He has given everything to Him. But Jesus is saying more than this:

1. As the Father loves Him (Jesus).
2. Jesus loves you.
3. So now the Father loves you like He loves Him (Jesus)!

Consider the prayer of our Lord recorded at John 17:23:

²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

You see dear Christian, this is a fact: the Father loves you as much as His only begotten Son. And He backs it up through an active expression of it through the things of His love: like His Holy Sacrament given to you again this day to keep you in the forgiveness of sins. One theologian put it this way: “There is nothing more certain than the love of the Father in Christ for believers.” (Buls, Exegetical Notes Gospel Texts Series B Mark-John Festival Season Sunday, 107)

And this is where our great protection comes from, because we know how much we are loved, we do not hear the Lord’s command, “abide in my love” as drudgery, but as a great gift. This points firstly to the great love God has for us...this is a fact and now we are protected so as not to abandon it.

How do we abide in this love?

Christ clearly answers this question:

1. Keep my commandments (John 15:10).
2. As I kept my Father’s commandments (John 15:10).

Needless to say we must understand what this means. First of all, our Lord and Savior makes it easy for us: all of His commandments are summed up in one word: “love.” OK, but what does this mean? The answer is in how Christ loved the Father and kept His commandments. This too is made simple: while the Lord Jesus was on earth He

loved the Father. He was always doing that which was pleasing to the Father. Jesus celebrated the active love of His heavenly Father by actively living for Him.

Jesus is in no way contradicting Himself. He knows your weakness. He knows of your sin, but He also knows what happens when you celebrate in saving faith the great love that God has for you. Something happens in such a heart. You want to love. Notice the wording here: you *want* to love! But what of my sinful flesh that does *not* want to love?! We get that...as for that, confess that to God to remain in the forgiveness of sins, but now we speak of the new creation, the new man: this one rejoices in the love of God and knows true joy...the joy that anticipates heaven itself (this is the joy Jesus is describing; not acting like the world that needs happiness and joy on the luck of a bouncing ball that might land on a fortunate slot, but the joy of knowing that the kingdom of God is already promised you; it is the joy of knowing that the Father loves you as He loves His only Son)! And this new man who knows such love -- this love that is now really yours -- loves. We want to please God! "And his commandments are not burdensome." (1st John 5:3b) We like more and more to love...love is our faith in action; love is our protection from ourselves...love invests us into the lives of others and there is no better place to be, because to live in self is to live in misery, but to live for God and for others is to live in love...God's love which extended His only Son for us is the love we now have that extends for others...this is the love -- and it is God's gift -- that keeps us abiding in Christ.

But you must understand the command here. It is not like the old law: "Do this or else!" This is not a command that fills us with dread and helplessness. This is the love that the love of God for you itself has produced. This is love that is free. This is love that knows no compulsion...it just flows from the love of God for you. This love is miraculous love. People want signs of God. Well God has given us the greatest sign that Christ is here: see His love. It's the way His people live. It is the way you live and it is the sign that you abide in Christ. This causes joy to surge in us. We know what life is about: living in the love of God and sharing His love...this is why we are here...now we know and this makes us joyful...we know why we are here and we know where we are going...and this is cause for joy! Rejoice in your protection and assurance Christian, you abide in Christ and you know you do through His peace, His love, and His joy!