

## **Making Our Home in Jesus**

John 15:1-10

Lake Shore Baptist Church, Waco, Texas

May 2, 2021

*Our Gospel reading is John 15:1-10.*

*I am the true vine, and God is the vine-grower. God removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit God prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. 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. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. God is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As God has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept God's commandments and abide in God's love.*

*This is the Gospel of grace.*

*Thanks be to God.*

In the latter chapters of John's Gospel Jesus speaks to his disciples about his relationship with them, choosing various images to convey the facet of their relationship that concerns him at the moment. For example, in the passage we considered last week, he stressed his protective role, speaking of himself as a shepherd and his disciples as his flock. *"The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep,"* he said. By contrast, the hired hand turns and runs at the first sight of wolves.

In the passage we just read, he stresses a different facet of his relationship with his followers, expressed by the image of the relationship between a vine and its branches. It is one of his better-known images, suggesting a symbiotic relationship between Jesus and his followers.

But there is another image embedded in this passage, hidden in the language, an image that I find even more insightful. I am talking about the word "abide" and the imagery it suggests.

You might say, "But the word 'abide' doesn't suggest an image." We need to take, as TV journalists are teaching us to say, a deep dive into biblical Greek. I promise it will be brief and relatively painless. The Greek word that is translated "abide" -- meno -- is often translated to remain or to continue. But it can also be translated to dwell, to live in. For example, when some of Jesus' disciples met him for the first time, they asked, "Where are you staying?" (John 1:38) Where do you live? The Greek word that is translated "staying" is meno, the word that is translated "abide" in our text.

Here is the key: the noun form of that verb is mone. Since meno can mean to dwell in, mone can mean a dwelling place. For example, in the familiar passage that is often read at funerals, Jesus says, "In my father's house, there are many dwelling places

(or “mansions” in the King James Version).” The Greek word that is translated “dwelling places” is *mone*, the noun form of “*meno*,” to abide or to dwell.

All of which leads me to say that to abide in Jesus means to make him our dwelling place, or to make our spiritual home in him. That is the point of this sermon. We will come back to that idea and explicate it a bit in a few minutes.

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First, I owe you a bit of my spiritual autobiography. I do not come to the subject of spirituality naturally or comfortably. We didn’t even know that word in the Southern Baptist Church I grew up in. If we had known it, we wouldn’t have used it, because it would have sounded too Catholic. We certainly had spiritual disciplines, though we didn’t know those words either. We had Daily Bible Readings, which accounted for 15% on eight-point record system that we filled out every Sunday night in Training Union. And we certainly believed in and practiced prayer. We believed in it so much that when there was something really important to be prayed for, like an up-coming revival, we had round the clock prayer meetings. In spite of the fact that Jesus told his disciples that they were not to be like Gentiles “*who think they will be heard because of their many words.*” (*Matthew 6:7*) Nor did it occur to us that we were Gentiles, like the ones Jesus didn’t want his disciples to be like.

But one thing we did well. Jesus said to his disciples, “*Abide in my word.*” Make your spiritual home in my word. In every Sunday School lesson there was a “Memory Verse” that we were to memorize and be prepared to recite in class. I didn’t always do it, but I got the message that memorizing scripture was an important thing to do. I have no idea how many verses I know in whole or in part. Of course, I memorized the King James Version, so to this day, when I quote a scripture, it is the King James that I quote.

“Make your spiritual home in my word.” Words like: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God;” “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy;” “Do unto others what you would have them do unto you;” “Seek first the kingdom of God;” “The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath;” “As much as you have done it to one of the least of these, you have done it to me;” “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

It is no exaggeration to say that my spiritual life is what it is, whatever it is, in large part because of the words of Jesus.

I owe Sunday School teachers like Uncle Charlie Whithorne, the three-fingered house painter, for instilling in me a love for the words of Jesus.

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To abide in Jesus also means that we make our spiritual home in his love. “*If you keep my commandments, you will abide – you will make your spiritual home -- in my love.*”

It is often noted that on occasion Jesus was “moved with compassion.” When he saw a large hungry crowd, he was moved with compassion. When two blind men approached him and begged for mercy, he was moved with compassion. When he saw a funeral procession, he was moved with compassion for the man’s mother, not only because she had lost her only son, but because she now had no means of support.

In his parable of the Good Samaritan the hero was moved with compassion for the wounded and potentially dying man he saw beside the road. Likewise, the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son was moved with compassion for his wayward son, newly returned.

I am not going to dive deeply into the Greek here, because I can't even pronounce the Greek word that is translated "compassion." Any word that has a "g" in the middle followed by a "ch" and three letters later a "z" is, to most English speakers, unpronounceable. I am not going to try to pronounce it in this public forum. It is important to point out, however, that the core of that word refers to one's internal organs. You've heard the phrase "the bowels of compassion"? This is where that came from. To be moved with compassion is to be moved so deeply that you feel it in your gut. That is what Jesus experienced when he witnessed human suffering, suffering of body, mind or spirit.

To make one's spiritual home in Jesus means to make one's home in that quality of love. A love that has a visceral, bodily effect on you. A love that you can neither ignore nor dismiss. A love that demands something of you. A love that demands a response that, if not acted on, leaves you feeling as though you have disobeyed a divine directive.

To make our spiritual home in Jesus means to live in and to live out his compassion.

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There is one final takeaway from this text. I suggest that we think of it as a transition to our observance of communion. "*Abide in me as I abide in you,*" Jesus told his disciples. "Make your home in me, as I make my home in you."

What did he mean when he said that he would make his home in us?

I think we don't often consider how vulnerable Jesus was when he spoke those words. John places our text in the last week of Jesus' life. His trial, torture and death were just ahead, creating an ominous shadow over everything he thought and said and did. He was going to die a humiliating, extremely painful death, and according to the Gospels, by this time he knew it. "It is finished," he said from the cross, days later. But he had known that for some time. If there was anything left undone, it was not going to be done.

For better or for worse, from that point on he would live in and through those who bore his name. He was now at the mercy of his disciples, those who claimed to be his followers, those who called him Lord. However they understood him, however they presented him to the world, that is who he would be. He was no longer in control of his own legacy. They were. We are. For better or for worse.

## **Communion**

On the evening before his trial, the night before his death, Jesus took bread, blessed it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Every time you eat this bread, remember me."

Then he took wine, blessed it and gave it to them, saying, "Every time you drink of this cup, remember me."

## **Benediction**

May God grant that we might be, in the words of Henri Nouwen, "living reminders" of Jesus. Having grounded our spirituality in him, having made our spiritual home in him, may we be faithful to his word, faithful to his love. Amen.