

ABIDING IN JESUS

Jesus has gathered his disciples around him and seeks to prepare them for what they are about to witness. He foresees the hardships and death he is about to face. As he meets them for the last time, Jesus yearns to console them. He is aware of the trials they will face in the days ahead. At the same time Jesus invites those disciples to enter into a more profound relationship by encouraging them to abide in him. Rather than sounding a note of despair, Jesus speaks a word of hope and trust for their souls.

In his words to his disciples, "I AM" the true vine, Jesus identifies his divinity in his expression, "I AM. Saying, "I AM is with you so stay with me, have trust in me.

In the Old Testament, God revealed His name to Moses (Exodus 3:13-14) as "I AM WHO I AM" Thus, in Judaism, "[I AM](#)" is unquestionably understood as a name for God. Whenever Jesus made an "I AM" statement, He identified himself as one with God and in today's reading¹ urges his disciples to abide in him.

In his translation "*The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language*," Eugene H. Paterson uses the words, "*live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you.*" The notion of making a home, 'of finding the heart's true home in Jesus,' brings a settled peace to the uncertainty that often characterizes our lives. Calling and inviting us to have that assurance that there is peace in Christ. Notwithstanding, we would bear fruit if we could trust in God and make him our home. Reassurance comes from remaining close to Jesus, irrespective of whatever storm may come.

Making your home in Jesus leads to us bearing fruit and bearing fruit when it counts grows from union with Jesus. Finding that home in God and letting God's word find a home in us through our devotion bring about great joy and inner peace. How do I allow God's word to find home in us? I suggest trusting God's promises and knowing that God is faithful and will forever remain that to you. Jesus assures his followers of his promises and encourages them to abide in him, and he warns them they cannot do it alone by trusting in their strength. On

¹ John 15:1-8.

their own, they would be cut off from their life source and consequently would bear no fruit.

However, the theological task is to allow this image to stimulate critical reflection on our churches and ourselves. The passages² remind us of who we are in the scheme of things framed by Jesus' command of self-giving love. Pointing it out that *"you bear much fruit" and become disciples, and in this, God is glorified*" (v8). The questions then to reflect on are: what precisely is the fruit we are to bear? Is it simply a matter of love or charity to be exercised within the church, of which we have numerous examples in the NT writings? Is it a missionary activity? The care for the poor, the sick, the prisoners, the orphan, the widow, and the elderly? Does it involve Christianising our society as far as possible, remaking its laws to reflect and portray our religious values? Howsoever individual churches and Christians resolve these questions, the larger context of the two Johns readings offers us a starting point for each of us. Whatever your answer, we are constantly reminded that "Christian life begins in love and carried out in love.

The love command is the imperative moment of Christ's teaching that prevents followers of Jesus from being a self-contained reality. As Jesus phrased it, the greatest commandment encompasses the love of God and neighbours.³ The two do not exist separately from each other.

Our love for God and our neighbours is evidenced through our constant expression of love for each other. When we stay, remain, or make Jesus our home, we can bear fruit. Bearing fruits does not create disciples; bearing fruits reveals disciples. What are the fruits: peace, kindness, gentleness, self-control, forbearance, goodness, faithfulness (*Gal. 5:22-23*). Separation from the vine is the end of hope for the fruit and the end of life for the "branches." Both activities depend on abiding in Jesus, the real vine.

² 1 John 4:7-21 and John 15:1-8.

³ Matthew 22:37-40

Jesus is the true vine, and we are the branches of the vine. Staying attached to Jesus would nourish us spiritually and lead us to bear fruit. The kind of fruit we bear will be determined by the vine we are attached to. In Jesus' words, "*By their fruit, you will know them.*"⁴ May our gracious God lead us in our fruit-bearing to always remain attached to the vine, Jesus, our true source of life. I have no doubt in my heart about your faithfulness and dedication to God's work and know that God continues to make his home in us as we have made home in him. Peace be with you.

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⁴ Matthew 7:16-20.