

“Abide!”
+5 Easter B +
Acts 8:26-40; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8
May 3, 2015

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen. The text for our message is the Gospel for this day.

May is the month of special events! We start each May here at Jehovah with **Celebrating our Seniors!** – those members of Jehovah who are the strong roots of the vine that is still growing and producing fruit here on the corner of Thomas and Snelling 92 years after this congregation was founded! Next week is **Mothers’ Day** and the 17th is the final Sunday for *Jehovah’s Choir* and the *Praise Teams: Prophecy & Spirit Freed* because on May 24th we begin our summer schedule with one service at 9:30 AM. **May 31st** we’re scheduled to have a special Trinity Sunday Service with the Mekane Yesus at 2:30 in the afternoon – their time for worship and we’ll share treats afterward. I don’t know if you’re aware but Ethiopians celebrate friendship and fellowship with popcorn and a very sweet strong coffee. So much happening in such a short amount of time as we move through the final weeks of the Easter season to Ascension, Pentecost to the contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity.

Today’s Gospel is more down to earth – right down in the dirt, really, as Jesus tells us He is the vine and we are the branches. Every Israelite knew about vineyards and wine – from the time they were weaned they drank a weak watery wine every day (a very good thing as the alcohol killed off the germs in the water). Oh, they drank water, as well – usually from a well – deep wells and water was drawn from those wells and flowed through aqueducts to nourish the crops – and especially the vineyards. They didn’t drink fresh grape juice like we do – it gave them a stomachache and was only available right after the grape harvest, but wine was central to the festivals of their faith – not just watery wine you drank every day but the stronger wine for Passover and the other church festivals, for dinners after sacrifices were made at the temple and at weddings. The care and nurture of vineyards was essential to their everyday lives.

When my parents retired my father had it in mind to grow grapes and, perhaps, to make some wine. What he discovered is that especially in cold climates you have to use the roots of a hardy kind of grape, get the hardy rootstock well established and then graft into the strong rootstock vine branches to produce the grapes for your wine.

When Jesus said, "I am the Vine" He was announcing that He was/is/ever shall be the rootstock vine that will not fail. Just as He is the cornerstone that keeps the whole building square, the capstone that keeps an arch in balance, so Jesus is the vine – the one and only rootstock that will not fail. To this sure and certain rootstock we are grafted to bear much fruit.

God grafted you into God's vine in that first splash of baptism. It was only water. Or was it? No, it was water commanded by God and connected with His promise, that's why we do it. 2,000 years ago when Jesus told His followers to go and make more disciples by baptizing and teaching, He knew that one day, you also would take that bath in grace and thus be grafted into and become a branch of Jesus, the true vine.

That connection is not founded on circumstances or ceremonies, but grounded in grace. Some of the seniors we celebrate today were confirmands here at Jehovah or at other churches more than 80 years ago, but I know, to a person they would not tell you about the strength of their commitment to God in Christ Jesus but about God's grace shown to them again and again in Christ Jesus throughout their lives. How God has been and remains faithful to them as they and we abide in Jesus, are watered anew and refreshed again and again by our baptism, fed by God's Word, nourished by the Lord's Supper, bask in the glory of worship and praise and grow together in the fellowship of God's people – with fruit enough to share with a hungry and thirsty world – with all who are in need.

Over and over, 8 times in 8 verses, Jesus used the word "abide." 43 times in this Gospel and his other writings John uses this word, "abide." The simple meaning is "stay connected," I suppose – which shouldn't be too difficult as Jesus abides in you, through the power of the Holy Spirit, lives in your heart by faith. Truth is, though, you can share a living space with someone and not pay much attention to them. I was 12 before I had my own bedroom. Sharing a room with two brothers could be joyful and painful. Our sister's room was right across the hall. Our father, having put in an extra barrier of soundproofing so he wouldn't have to hear us upstairs didn't hear much of what went on when we were supposed to be asleep. What I remember most fondly are the times we would share dreams, talk about all kind of things. Our brother Mike made up stories about LoLo Kloonex and a song about a Rambler (that was a make of car, as some of you will recall). Oh how we would laugh. I remember when Carol came in after we watched Mary Martin as Peter Pan. We jumped on the beds crowd – pretending we were off

to *Never-never-land*. In those glorious moments we were abiding with one another – truly at home in our abode – one family – happy and at peace (now I'll get real and tell you it wasn't very often!) In fact, going to a boarding school I knew rooms where there was a line literally drawn down the middle of a room and the roommate who didn't have the door on his side only crossed that line to leave the room. You can share an abode and not abide.

Being grafted into Jesus, the Vine, guarantees that God's great desire is to truly abide with you – jump on the beds laugh together joyfully and hug and cry and find comfort together kind of abide with you. This text tells us God's love, mercy, forgiveness, growth is all there for you – new shoots, new branches, new ways to produce everlasting fruit are always there for all of us – God desires us to grow, to stretch, never to break and always to bear fruit. My job as pastor – really everyone's job here in our family of faith at Jehovah is to fertilize one another with encouragement to nudge one another grow in God's Word, to sustain one another by praying for each other and to always point one another back to Jesus and His command for us to be known by our love for one another – love shown in service to all people of all nations of all faiths – that fruit of love and service is what we are called to bear. Love that reflects in our own less than perfect way the unfathomable love of “Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever.”

Jesus remains the same – but we don't, do we? I'm sure that all of our seniors will tell us that their lives are nothing like they were 20, 40, 60 years ago – the world, the church is not like it was in past decades but Jesus – Jesus remains the same and the church, well, I'm not worried about the church (though my wife might tell you that is a lie as all I seem to do is worry about the church) but ultimately I know that Jesus is Lord of the Church – Jesus is the Vine that will not fail and God's church will not fail. Jesus is not through with any of us yet – won't be until we are safely home abiding in perfect unity and love for eternity.

Until then, well, none of us are finished products. Everything in the Gospel's vine and branches talk is all about growth and development and bearing fruit. I watched my father, a master gardener, prune things back to where I was certain they would never produce even leaves again – oh, but they came back, flourished – you don't prune something that won't bear fruit but when the pruning is happening, well, it isn't pretty. We are promised that this pruning God does in our lives is because God loves us. Sometimes, most times in our lives, it hurts. No one likes

their sins and shortcomings pointed out. Still, so often it is the setbacks and disappointments and mistakes of life that teach us the most. Those that are of our own doing, that are our own fault – they hurt the most, and still the loving hand of God uses them to teach us, to make us better, kinder, wiser.

And what they all can teach us, spiritually, is trust. Trust that our Heavenly Father really does see down life's roads farther than we do and that Jesus truly abides in us, not as a roommate on the other side of a line ignoring us but, through the Spirit is always there to nudge us, to call us back to abide together, truly abide, in love. AMEN