

The 2023 PEACE ON EARTH Series

“My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and, in this way, prove that you are my disciples. As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love.

John 15:8-9 (CEB)

Peace on Earth *ABIDING*

Jesus' third point in this farming metaphor series concerns the idea of abiding. The word “abide” or “remain” is repeated many times in this little story so it must be important.

A book I read for TEDDY TALK inspiration is Marcus Borg's *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*. In the first chapter he tells of his own journey to understanding Jesus. Borg writes about several phases in which his understanding of Jesus changed. At one point, he viewed Jesus primarily in terms of His involvement in the social and political issues of His days in Jerusalem. But finally, Borg came to realize the significance of spiritual behavior in the life of Jesus. He says that Jesus' grounding in the world of the Spirit was foundational for His life and in turn, for each of ours. Jesus' relationship to the God (the Spirit) was the source of everything that He was and what we are to be.

Until my late thirties, I saw the Christian life as being primarily about attending church and believing, and occasionally attempting to speak in tongues. (If you don't know, feel free to ask me later). Since then, I have concluded the Christian life is about entering into a relationship with Jesus as God, as the risen living Christ, or as the Spirit. In simpler words, as the Trinity. These truths are fundamental to believing.

We United Methodists live out our relationship to God within the framework of the Christian tradition. Our relationship involves one in a journey of transformation. Transformed to John Wesley's understanding of achieving Sanctifying Grace. It is the point in our faith when we are enabled to live Holy Lives. The biblical image of a vine conveys a deep sense of the connectedness of us to the Divine. The real measure is not so much what we believe, but to whom we are linked. The better we are allied with God through Jesus, the more we are transformed.

Transformations of this nature comes from forming a relationship, not from effort, but from trust. Try to imagine someone walking up to a vine and yelling... “Start producing fruit!” Perhaps you will consider shouting just to make it more likely. We can all agree that nothing happens. Understand that once the vine growers have done their jobs, all the branches must do to bear fruit is to remain connected to the vine.

Allow me to share my own images about abiding in Christ. Years ago, I was in a job that required me to fly to different states recruiting insurance agents for my company. In those times, being late to the airport for flights was not unusual for me. I often hurriedly hopped in my car from home in Benbrook, or work in West Fort Worth. No confession intended, but I might have violated more than a few traffic laws to get to the airport. Every delay upped my stress level. At last, I reach the terminal parking lot, grab my stuff and race down the corridor to get straight to the right gate. No TSA lines then!!

Picture me running down the skywalk glancing at my Timex. As I enter the plane, I smile at the flight attendant, collapse into my seat, and sigh deeply in relief. I made it and when lucky, I settled into the non-smoking section. In one sense just entering the plane, I felt I had reached my destination. Then the pilot taxied and lifted off, and I was on my way to other places, going higher, faster than ever before. Each time I barely made it for takeoff, I had no frayed nerves or worries. The comfort of being seated and flying toward my destination is a comforting description of abiding in Christ.

Now we can rest assured, because as God loved Jesus, Jesus in turn loves you, and me, and all the residents of our world. It is reassuring to know Jesus simply asks us to remain in His love.

Peace Always,
Ted