

Abiding appears to be an unpopular idea in our modern society. It seems like nowadays people prefer to go with the latest trend or to be easily moved or offended; but the message today contrasts with that – it is to abide; to be steadfast, loyal, unshaken or unmoved by current events.

The word, abide, has fallen out of favor and usage over the past thirty years. Nevertheless, it was a common faith tradition in the Jewish world Jesus grew up in. And I'd like to bring it back, starting today, with the Gospel lesson we heard where Jesus said: *Abide in me as I abide in you.*

What does abide mean? Taken from its Hebrew and Greek roots, when I think of abide, I think of the channel markers that make up the inland coastal waterway. If you are a boater in this area, you'll know what I am talking about. There are important posts, like a short telephone pole, that tell boaters where the channel is and, perhaps more importantly, where one will run aground. If you have seen Sarasota Bay, it is beautiful. It is a 52 square mile estuary (a semi-enclosed body of water where freshwater mixes with salt water) that borders Sarasota, Lido Key, our very own Longboat Key, Anna Maria Island, and the City of Bradenton. The bay features mangrove-lined flats and nearshore reefs perfect for fishing, kayaking, or just relaxing and watching the sunset. When we moved here, I was told Sarasota Bay, the deepest bay in the area, has an average depth of 7 feet. Now that I have boated and kayaked on it for five years, I can tell you that the true depth is about three feet. There are places where it is 7 feet, but that is between the channel markers. Boaters depend on staying between the channel markers.

What does this have to do with abiding. Channel markers abide. The tide pushes against them and then pulls against them, twice a day, but they stay fixed right where they need to be. Reckless boaters hit them, birds build nests on them, 900 lb. manatees rub their backs against them, the sun and saltwater try to deteriorate them, yet they abide. Hurricane force winds batter them, storm surge push, and, as we experienced with Hurricane Ian, almost all of Sarasota Bay was emptied from the reverse surge; yet the channel markers abide. I don't know how far down they go, but the post is driven deep into the sandy bottom of Sarasota Bay and there they abide, night and day.

When Jesus said, "Abide in me," I think of those channel markers. We are to hold fast, to stay true, to be steadfast, to stay in place with Jesus through all the storms of life. And not only the storms, but we are also to abide with him through the changing whims of society and of our current political culture. We are to abide in him. It's not an exciting word; it's not sexy; it is remaining still and grounded in God through Christ through all the changes in life.

There are two parts to today's lesson: *Abide in me as I abide in you.* Like a channel marker with our soul, Jesus abides with us. Period. We can push against him; we can pull against him, but he will abide with us. We can deny him, ignore him, we can do the opposite of loving God and our neighbor, yet Jesus abides with us. There is nothing we can do to get rid of God's love. God's abiding love remains with us. Jesus is asking us to abide in him.

I mentioned in the beginning that this is not a popular message within today's society. What I'm talking about specifically is advertising culture. They don't want us to abide. They want us to be malleable, wishy-washy, easily swayed. Spoiler alert: I'm going to ruin every commercial you are going to see. I used to be in advertising and marketing (and sales). I know how it works. First, they show you something you don't have. Second, they make you feel bad for not having it. Third, they show you how much better your life would be with it and how you can get it ("*Talk to your doctor about blah blah blah*"). I don't know if Cadillac is advertising to you; they are advertising to me. For years they have been showing me guys who look like me, driving one of their cars, how awesome they feel driving it and that I'd feel the same way they do if I stop by my local Cadillac dealer. When I feel this way, I need to remember to abide – abide in the financial plan my wife and I have which does not include a new Cadillac car payment but does include me driving my beloved Toyota Camry. The advertising world doesn't want me to abide; they want me to be easily swayed.

I have a degree in political science which tells me that every referendum, campaign, and political party uses the same advertising system. They show you something you don't have, what life would be like with it (or without something), and they show you how good, or bad, your life, or society, or our nation would be. During seminary, when we were living in California, there was a referendum to change the way California handles pricing for gasoline. (California has the most cars, uses the most fuel and has the most refineries than any other state – and more than half of the other G7 countries, by the way). There were advertisements against the referendum with images of mile-long gas lines and literally ends with half of Los Angeles on fire. It was a stark image of *this-is-what-your-life-would-look-like*. Yet, advertising works; the initiative failed.

In the face of all of this, Jesus tells us to abide. Abiding is holding onto what you have been taught in faith and to not let the whims of advertising or society sway you. To be grounded in faith and in love, that is abiding.

Abiding is not a Christian invention. Jesus was referring to an ancient Jewish practice of holding onto one's faith during hard or confusing times. We are witnesses of this. This past week, we saw images of Passover seder meals where people of the Jewish faith held fast to their tradition and were reminded that they too were held in captivity in Egypt and were set free. They remembered that one day all people will be free – especially those held in captivity by Hamas. If you think about their history and how year after year the faithful gather to remember and to have hope, that is what it means to abide. We are watching it unfold around us today.

One of the first outward Christian symbols after the persecutions were over was the anchor cross. Emperor Constantine decided to tolerate Christianity (to no longer persecute Christians) and then did a census to see how many in his empire belonged to the faith tradition. One of the first symbols of that new era was a cross that had a large smiley face at the bottom – the traditional anchor. It was a Christian symbol which meant abiding. You see, in a storm, a ship faces into the wind and is held in place by the anchor. Although the anchor is invisible, what is visible is that the ship is not moving but is abiding against the storm. Christians during the early Church era had to keep their symbols invisible but the outward visible sign was that those who believed in Christ were able to weather storms of life and not be tossed around by the whims of society.

This past Saturday morning, we had a memorial service for Brian and Jean Rushton with the interment of ashes into our columbarium. Brian passed away in '22 and Jean passed in March '24 and they are now permanent members of Longboat and All Angels. Born in England and after traveling the world, they found Longboat to be their home. They were both active in the parish. Brian was on the finance committee and helped come up with the memorial garden idea complete with various columbariums. It is fitting that their ashes are now here.

After the service was over, we released fifty monarch butterflies. It is said that the butterflies stay in the area for a couple of weeks, so I am on the lookout for them. Once all that that was over, one of their daughters and sons-in-law decided that they needed to secure their place near Brian and Jean in the columbarium. They asked their daughter, Sophia, where she would like her place to be. She looked up at her dad and said with a smile on her face, "Do you realize how sick it is to ask a ten-year old where she'd like to be buried?!" After a moment she said, "I'd like to be here."

Abiding love is what I think of when I think of Brian and Jean – their love for each other, their family and for God and the Church. Even through Brian's parkinson's disease and Jean's dementia, they abided in their faith and their love. They had seen a lot of changes in their lifetimes, yet they held true and steadfast. They also set an example for their children, and their grandchildren, of the importance of abiding.

One last thing, a different son-in-law shared that one of his favorite memories was when Brian and Jean would relax with a drink and watch the sunset over the Gulf. He said that Jean would call him as the sun set and ask how his week had been. He then said, "I'd usually be out shoveling snow and she'd call and talk about how beautiful the weather is on Longboat." I replied, "But how wonderful that on that special moment, watching the sunset, she thought of you and called." He reflected on it teary-eyed and said yes, it is something he will always hold (abide) onto. Saturday night, the family gathered to watch the sunset. And, as it went down, they called their family who could not be with them and asked them about how their day was. They are abiding in the love that Brian and Jean showed them. The tradition continues.

Abiding is not exciting, or a thrill ride; abiding is not sexy; but it is one of the most important aspects of our faith life. It's the invisible character trait that keeps us holding during storms. Like a channel marker, our abiding love guides others on the right path to go.