

Meadowbrook Congregational Church

“Abide in Me”

Mother’s Day – May 10, 2009

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John 15:1-8

‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he 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. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

“I have loved you; abide in my love.” Jesus had gathered in the Upper Room with his disciples. Like Mother’s Day, it was a time to express appreciation for loyalty and affection. Like high school graduations, it was a time of impending separation and change. Abide in me. Make your home in me as I have made my home in you.

I was reading an article in *Christian Century* this week by F. Dean Lueking, a Lutheran seminary professor. He talked about that strange word “abide.” We don’t use it very much in our everyday language. It’s an old fashioned word. The news anchors don’t say “Abide with us right after the break and Chuck will tell us about the weather.” Motel signs say, “Stay here,” not “abide with us tonight.” Dan Dickerson doesn’t describe a Detroit Tiger rally by saying, “a hit and then a walk and now the Tigers have two abiding on the basepaths.”

I found it interesting that Lueking said he found seventeen Oxford dictionary uses for the word “abide.” Of those seventeen uses, eight are obsolete. A glance at the thesaurus yield the following synonyms: lodge, house, stay, tarry, stop, sojourn, pitch tent, rest, sit, lie, keep, settle, anchor, inhabit, dwell, reside, plant oneself, and live. While we might say any of these words, we would probably not choose the word “abide.” It truly seems to belong to some other time and place.

But I think that it is important, perhaps especially today, to embrace the word “abide.” Abide has to do with persevering, continuing, lasting, staying with it. It conveys a feeling of stability and some sort of endurance. Relationships come and go. Contracts become worthless pieces of paper. Treaties between nations are forgotten. Even marriage covenants are often broken. But one who abides in a relationship and with a purpose takes his/her strength from the love of God that would go anywhere and do anything to accept us, to forgive us, and to offer us hope. Abiding is when one

plants loving seeds in often uneventful yet important moments, seeds that sometimes take root, grow up and mature into future acts fruitful living.

Jesus offers a vine and its branches as the perfect illustration of abiding. If the branches abide in the vine- stay connected, find their identity, gain strength and purpose- they will produce fruit. Jesus teaches us that if we abide in him, if we persevere in our relationship with the divine source of all life, then we will produce lasting fruit which will bless us as well as others.

I have shared with you before the words that my father used to offer to me as a teenager when I went out the door for an important social engagement. He did not say, "Behave yourself," or "Be careful." He said, "Remember who you are." He was asking the branch to always remember where the vine was.

Abide in me. On Mother's Day we remember the vine which gave us life and which nurtured us to the possibility of producing good fruit ourselves. As we honor our graduates, we urge them to abide – to remember the relationships of family and of God, and the lessons taught by those who cared- and to be faithful to who you have been encouraged to be. On this Mother's Day we give thanks that God's love abides in us. We pray that we might always abide in its joy.