

"Abide"

John 15:1-8

May 14, 2006

It's Mother's Day and I want to take a minute to acknowledge mothers on this day - and for that matter all of those who serve in nurturing, care giving roles. It has to be a tremendous challenge to raise up a child to know all of the things that we need to know. It has to take patience and a readiness to teach at any moments. - - - I read about a mother who was patiently watching over her 4 year old son as he tried to get his teeth brushed. There was tooth paste everywhere. And worse yet, at one point the tooth brush suddenly slipped out of his mouth and he lost his grip on it altogether so that the tooth brush went flying out of his hand and happened to fly right into the toilet. The boy smiled a bit and went to retrieve it but his mother got to it first and managed to carefully fish it out of the water and threw it into the garbage can with the explanation that it now had too many germs to be used. The boy listened intently and then ran off to his parents bathroom where he grabbed his mother toothbrush and brought it to her and said: "We should maybe throw this one too. It fell in the toilet last week."

Certainly a word of thanks is appropriate for those who have care for and trained us. These people have allowed us to grow and mature into the people we have become. Now - it may be that our mothers, fathers, teachers, pastors and others might have hoped for a better outcome but we are who we are, in large part, because of the gifts we have received from those who have cared most deeply for us.

I am reminded of the mother who sent a note with her son to give to the teacher on the boys first day of school. The note read: "The opinions expressed by this child are not necessarily those of his parents." Of course, such a statement may well be true - - - but where would a young person entering first grade get his opinions. Wouldn't it be safe to assume that much would have come from the adults that raised him, cared for him, spent the most time with?

Jesus said, "Abide in me!" I am fascinated by this call on this Mother's Day. And I wonder what it might mean for us as the children of God. How is it that we 'abide in Him'? What does it mean for us as we live our lives?

Jesus was a great teacher. He used images to convey important meaning. In today's Gospel text He tells us that there is a critical connection between us and Him. "I am the true vine - you are the branches on that vine." We - the branches receive life itself from the vine. We receive every day all that we need to support our continued existence through that vine. It is easy enough to see exactly what happens when any branch become disconnected from the vine or the trunk or stem on which it has grown. Our North Dakota winds have disconnected enough branches from my trees

to know that it does not take long before the green leaves on that broken branch are withered and the branch itself begins to dry out and die. But it is even more that the fact that the branch receives life giving nourishment from it's connection to the vine. The very characteristic of the branch are determined by the stock from which it came.

"Abide in Me!" We have received our life from God. Who and what we can become comes from what God has made us to be. "Abide in Me!" Remain connected to - - stay with - - walk with - - continue to learn from and grow in Him. And God will abide in you. He will continue to work with us so that we can be all that He hoped we would be.

It is really a pretty simple image to understand. God - our heavenly father, gives us life and continues to provide for us daily as the vine sends life sustaining moisture and nutrients to the branches. We are what we have grown out of.

The difficult part of the text comes in the cutting off and the pruning that the vine grower does. It is perhaps tough enough just to try to be faithful in 'abiding' in Him - but the text talks about continued fruitfulness. It is indeed one thing to be connected to our God and acknowledge that we continue to daily to receive life from Him but it is quite another abide in that so that we produce the fruits of that 'abiding'.

There was a mother who was very proud of her young daughter. They had a wonderful relationship and spent a great deal of time together. She had trained her well in many things - one of which was telephone etiquette. One day as they were working together to prepare a meal, the phone rang. The mother had been setting out the condiments and was having trouble with the ketchup bottle. The new bottle, as too often we have all experienced, was not giving out it's treasures so she was banging it against the counter trying to get it to start flowing and she asked her daughter to answer the phone. The daughter quickly announced to her mother that it was the pastor calling and then the mother could hear her daughter telling the pastor: "I'm sorry, Mommy can't come to the phone right now. She's hitting the bottle!"

No matter how far we have come - we all could use a little pruning - a bit of guidance - the gentle hand of mom to guide and encourage us. I'm not quite sure how a loving mother might go about explaining to her daughter what she might have said that we wrong but I am sure that some explaining - some correcting might have been forth-coming. And I don't know how God goes about pruning us - - - but I know that we need that constant guidance that our God can offer.

Perhaps at least a part of the pruning comes thru the simple act of abiding. - - - When John wrote the letter from which our second scripture reading comes, he spoke a lot about abiding in God. And he spoke about the fact that abiding in God is deeply rooted in love. Love is from God, John tells us. And if we are abiding in God

we will live in love, both for God and for one another. The good news, it seems to me, is that in that kind of love, we do not need to fear the pruning - we do not have to fear the guidance of our God because we know that where He leads comes out of His love for us.

I suspect that in many ways the message might well sound very simplistic. Abide in God - abide in love - God is the source of your life. It is a very simple message - but it is one that we need to hear often. We are led off in so many directions. We become so completely connected to so many things in our world that too often we abide far from our God. In Love He wants to provide for us and guide us - trust God - - - abide in Him.

AMEN