

April 28, 2024

St. John 15:1-8:

Abide

- I. The Issue
- II. Clean
- III. Abide

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St. John 15:1-8

Dear Friends in Christ,

I'm starting with Jesus' explanation of The Parable of the Sower with some thoughts. "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what is sown along the path (Mt.13:19)." Most here have experienced this. You share the Gospel of Christ with someone. They listen; think about it; they walk away.

"As for what is sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for awhile, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away (Mt.13:20,21)." A person is brought to Christ and rejoices. Family or friends harass the individual, or the person suffers severe consequences. The person gives up and falls away.

"As for what was sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful (Mt.13:22)." We've witnessed this here a number of times, especially in the setting of an unbelieving spouse or sweetheart who pulls the person away.

"As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty (Mt.13:23)." That describes most, if not all, in this sanctuary. The pastors pray it's all. The point is this: each of us falls into one of these categories. All the more reason for us to take to heart what our Lord Jesus says to us this morning. It's based on one word . . .

ABIDE

I. The Issue

Johann (John) Gerhard is considered one of the great Lutheran theologians. His years were 1582-1637. He has been quoted a number of times from this pulpit. I deleted four paragraphs of the original draft of this sermon after reading one of his prayers from the book "Meditations on Divine Mercy"; a collection of his prayers translated by Matthew C. Harrison (Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 1923). The prayer is entitled, *The Daily Lapse into Sin*. The following are parts of that prayer with Scripture references Gerhard inserted following most of his petitions.

O Holy God, just judge, no one is innocent in your sight. No one is free from the uncleanness of sin (Job 14:4)...I do not have the robe of innocence in which I must be clothed in your sight. Seven times, no many more times in every hour I fail (Proverbs 24:16). Every day I sin seventy times seven. The spirit is sometimes willing, but the flesh is always weak (Matthew 26:41). The inner man is at times strong and firm, but the outer man is faint and weak...Depraved and impious thoughts appear in my mind (Sound familiar?). Vain, useless, and harmful words come out of my mouth (We couldn't keep a record!). Perverse, depraved, and unbecoming deeds pollute me (Would we want to discuss them?). All my righteous deeds are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

...I cry out to you from the depths (Psalm 130:1,3). Lord, if you hold our sins against us, who will survive? If You enter into judgment against us, who will remain (Psalm 143:2)?...If you require an exact accounting for my life, I cannot give an excuse either for a thousand sins or for one (Job 9:3). My mouth is stopped (Romans 3:19). I confess that before You I am worthy of eternal suffering...I justly deserve eternal imprisonment.

(And here comes what must be in our hearts) - For these sins that I commit every day of my life, I offer to you, O holy Father, the precious blood of Your Son, which was poured out on the altar of the cross. His blood cleanses me from all transgressions (1 Job 1:7). My sins hold me captive

and are powerful enemies, but still more precious and efficacious (that is, more capable of having the desired effect) is the ransom of Your Son. May that most perfect, full, and holy ransom of Christ avail for me, for the forgiveness of my transgressions. Amen. (pp. 36,37).

This brings us to our text for this morning . . .

II. Clean

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you (vv.1-3)."

It's fairly simple. Branches might appear to be connected, but if they fail to bear fruit they need to be cut away. Christ is addressing the fruit of faith. I recall, from years ago, asking a man that old question, "What would you say to God if He asked you 'Why should I let you into heaven?'" A bit offended by the question, he answered, and this is an exact quote, "Well, I go to church!" That's expected, but no one goes to heaven just because they go to church. It's not necessarily the fruit that points to the sweetness of forgiveness and eternal life.

The part we want to grasp is this: "Already you are clean because of the word I have spoken to you." The key element of this statement is "the word." It's the Word that makes us clean; the Word, Jesus, who has cancelled the debt of our sin. We know the words: "though your sins are like scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool (Is.1:18)."

Do you remember these words of the Apostle John? "And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed.' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them (Rev. 14:13).'" You see, once again, our works do not pay for one sin or earn God's favor. They follow us and are evidence of the faith we profess. They are a natural expression of praise and thanksgiving for the love of God in Christ that forgives every sin and grants eternal life.

Maybe you can recall this statement of Jesus: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruit (Mt.15,16a)." Again, if a person is connected to the vine their works are the evidence, the fruit, of their faith. If a person is not, their works are the evidence of self glorification, as in the case of false prophets.

But there's something else, and to miss it is to miss everything...forever. Verses 4-8 of our text:

III. Abide

Abide in me, and I in you. 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. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples (vv.4-8).

The verb *abide* appears seven times in this text. The word has also been translated *remain*. To abide is a command; to stand firm, endure, and to do so though others do not. Four of those appearances are in the context of Christ's admonition "abide in me." We abide in Him through the means He has provided: Word and Sacrament - in expectation of knowledge, comfort, guidance and strength to endure. To abide in Him will produce fruit to proclaim His love and eternal life to others.

And here's what we cannot afford to miss. Listen carefully; once again: "...for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned." This needs no commentary. We do ourselves a favor to fix our hearts and minds on the word God gives through Hosea: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me (Hosea 4:6)." Our knowledge is connected to our use and understanding of God's Word. And let's not forget how the Lord describes us through the Apostle Peter: "...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation...(I Pt.2:9)."

The fruit we produce as the result of God's love in Christ and growth in knowledge is spelled out in these words the Holy Spirit had Paul write: "...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Gal.5:22,23)." It's what God gives to us in Christ: *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self control*. It's the fruit we can pass on to others. We are a loved and forgiven people, and even though we must walk through the valley of the shadow of death, in Christ our destiny is clear: We "shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." In the meantime, we must **Abide**.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott