

Abide with Jesus, or, Courageous Love

Reflection on the Word for Wesley Uniting, Canberra

Easter 5 – 2 May 2021

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Abide.

Most of the meanings of this English word given in my 20 year old Macquarie Dictionary are prefaced with 'archaic'. So 20 years ago, such use was considered no longer current.

I suspect today we generally think 'dwell' or 'stay', do we, when we encounter the word 'abide'? We might occasionally come across it in the sense of something we simply cannot 'abide' – hold to.

Some of the older uses of the word are helpful for considering the meaning when 'abide' is used in such contexts as the reading from the gospel today. Older meanings evoke a sense of sustaining, steadfastness, and even defiance. To stay here, with, in spite of challenge, in defiance of attack. To remain for the long haul even through trouble or triumph.

Steadfast. There's a word used of God throughout the biblical tradition. Especially when speaking of God's *steadfast love*.

Steadfast love.

To be steadfast is to hold firm, to remain, to endure. I was reflecting at our wedding ceremony yesterday here that love is endurance; love endures – through change, transformation, growth and development, love endures. Love abides. Love is steadfast, defiantly resisting our fear of change, our discomfort and pain through growth – it *holds on* – like a branch clings to and is held by the vine ...

Abide.

The Greek word translated here is *meno*. To translate *meno* adequately requires more than one word in English – to capture the breadth of its meaning you see it translated differently in different contexts.

We have already encountered the inadequacies of the one English word chosen in our passage for today to convey meaning for us because its use has changed over time. But looking at a range of other words connected with 'abide', we have begun to find some of the breadth of the meaning the composer of John reaches for with *meno*.

French, too, needs multiple languages to capture the breadth of *meno* – *vivre, rester, obeir*. And Swedish apparently reaches back to an archaic word as the most effective translation – *bliswer*. English uses abide, as we've seen, continue, remain, dwell, in translations such as the NRSV.

But Greek holds this range, depth, breadth of meaning in one word. *Meno*.

And John uses *meno* 36 times, 11 of which appear in chapter 15, where we are this week and next. When this word appears in chapter 6, the English there is also 'abide' – so there's a connection the translators are making.

If it seems relatively simple for a branch to abide, or remain, with the vine in chapter 15, in chapter 6 Jesus is talking about his followers eating his body and drinking his blood – abiding with that was more than many at the time could sustain.

To hold on with Jesus is to endure through the sometimes – might we say often – challenging and confronting call to action and being we hear from Jesus.

I think we begin to see that to 'meno' requires courage. To be steadfast, to endure, to *love* requires courage.

As we hear in 1 John today, and will in the next verses of John 15 next week, to love is to abide in Jesus, and to abide in God *is* to love.

Further, to love is to steadfastly, defiantly resist the urge to let go when it gets uncomfortable with Jesus, when it feels too hard. And it will. It does. It must.

Life with Jesus is *about* life, about living fully; is about resisting what diminishes, extinguishes, life. And these diminishing things – like greed, 'success', violence, exacting power of others, a selfish

desire for our own comfort – such things that diminish life have a strong lure, a tempting promise at an easy life.

It is not easy, life with Jesus.

Jesus does not promise that.

To live – to enter into the resurrection promise that defies death, steadfastly hold on to life even through death – that, excuse me, is bloody hard.

Anyone offering you a Christian discipleship that is comfortable, easy, entitles you to wealth and position and power simply because – is lying.

Anyone touting Christian community that keeps you comfortable, elevates you to status and wealth – anyone touting Christian community that is happy and snappy and easy is lying.

Imagine being a police officer in the USA, with their strong culture of shoot first, see the human second. Imagine being a police officer in that context and choosing to remain defiantly steadfast to Jesus' way of non-violence – how easy do you think that is?

That is what it means to *abide*. To let love endure: taking your finger off the trigger, your hand off the gun. To abide with Jesus, to endure with God's love, takes COURAGE.

Imagine being a government minister in charge of immigration, in our culture of fear of refugee seekers' potential to bring terrorism here, to take 'our' jobs, homes, resources. Imagine holding that portfolio and choosing to remain defiantly steadfast to Jesus' way of welcome for the stranger, God's way of abundant, restorative love?

Imagine actually ordering the closure of detention centres that dehumanise, harm, diminish life.

That is what it means to *abide* with Jesus, to let love endure- it is to open yourself to truly see the humanity of the other, and invite people to see them with you. It is to be COURAGEOUS.

Imagine being a follower of Jesus, so in tune with the Spirit that you hear and respond to the call to run towards a stranger – a person so other from you as to be from *Ethiopia*, to be a different in sexuality and gender identity, to be of a higher rank, better educated, more wealthy – and imagine sitting beside them as a fellow human being, opening yourself to the Sacred compositions alongside this person *so* other from you, and together encountering the Divine, responding to the Divine with the sacrament, with joy, with love !

To abide with Jesus, to endure with God's love is to be vulnerable, open, generous. To abide in the community of Jesus takes COURAGE.

So when Jesus asks us to *abide*, branches with his vine, he is asking us to be courageous, to choose his way, defiantly, in the face of discomfort, difficulty, temptation to take the easy way.

And he does not ask us to be courageous without himself showing courage – that vine image is an image of mutual hanging on to each other, dwelling *with*, together, steadfastly remaining here – God with us. God *with* us. Get it?

What is the resurrection of the Christ if it is not defiant, steadfast love enduring even through death?

So Jesus asks us to steadfastly remain with him as he steadfastly remains with us. Jesus asks us to have courage with our love and being. Will we?