

## Abide

John's Gospel lesson today uses a very important word for us to consider. The word is "abide." "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood *abide* in me, and I in them."

Abide is not an archaic word; however, it is not commonly used. One way it is used is in the negative context of something like: "I cannot abide that person's behavior." Put another way, "I can't accept that person's behavior," but saying "abide," puts more heft into the statement.

John uses the word "abide" to depict a relationship between Jesus and those who seek a deeper engagement with him spiritually. The use of the word "abide," is quintessentially Johannine in text and intent.

In common parlance today, we might say that a faithful couple of many years have an abiding love. You have probably used that phrase yourself. I know I have used the word "abiding love," when describing couples I've known throughout my life and ministry who exhibit the kind of enduring, faithful and joyful love that abiding implies.

It may be helpful to keep this example in mind when reading John. He is really writing about love. There is no abiding going on without a whole lot of loving. In spiritual terms, Jesus is extending himself to those of us in the world, giving



himself to us, loving us, and inviting us to respond in kind with love. When we do that, we are abiding in him and he is us.

Again, quite Johannine. This language is poetic to be sure. It is lyrical, beckoning our hearts to seek that close relationship with the Divine, recognizing that God—the divine loving force—is the source of all that we know of human love.

## Bread

These past five weeks we have concentrated on the Gospel of John, material all from the same chapter: Chapter 6. We heard the story of feeding of the five thousand, we saw Jesus walking on the water, we remembered the way the Hebrews were fed by manna when they made their way through the wilderness—a sticky substance which fed bodies desperate for food—and we heard Jesus saying "I am the Bread of Life." We learned that all of this is of and from God, from no other source. The

awesome power of God underlies every sign Jesus performs.

And today, at the conclusion of Chapter 6, Peter says, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” Hence, through Peter’s words we hear the definitive affirmation that Jesus really *is* the Holy One of God. He *is*, the Bread of Life, in other words.

Our lesson ends at this point; however, there is a brief exchange between Jesus and Peter that concludes Chapter Six. Immediately after Peter says that they – speaking for *all* the disciples—know that he is the Holy One of God, Jesus replies: “Did I not choose you, the twelve?” Yet, one of you is a devil.”

John, the Gospel writer, then pens these words: “He was speaking of Judas son of Simon Iscariot, for he, though one of the twelve, was going to betray him.”

### Conflict

Literally, the plot thickens at this point. John is pointing the reader to the ultimate conflict in the story about Jesus: one of his own is a traitor, one of the twelve. Authors such as Daniel Silva or John le Carre surely appreciate the drama of deception within the ranks, be it within MI6, the CIA or within Jesus’ twelve disciples. It is no small thing that the entirety of chapter 6 exposes Jesus to

be the Holy One of God. This exposure creates controversy, conflict and eventually his martyrdom. But that gets us ahead of the story.

### Eucharistic healing

The feeding of the five thousand which begins Chapter 6 creates a huge metaphor for how Jesus feeds us through his love for us. On earth *and* in heaven. Peter’s affirmation of Jesus’ divine role establishes that Jesus is not merely taking care of our spiritual needs on earth, but also is providing a way of being with him—abiding with him—beyond our time on earth, into Eternal Life.

When we share the Eucharistic meal at every Celebration of the Holy Eucharist we are partaking—being part of—this holy mystery. We are fed, indeed, by the Christ who remains with us throughout all time and into Eternity. When we share the Eucharistic meal we are living into the past, and the future, while we take blessed bread and wine into our mortal bodies. It is a continuation of the mystery of Christ himself, coming into the world to bring health, to bring salvation.

I find this spiritual phenomena most poignant at the bedside of the sick, or in the home of those too frail to come to church. The healing brought about through the sharing of the Eucharist goes beyond the description of words. When we share that bread and wine,

with prayer, we enter into the “thin place” as the Celts say—we enter into that place where the line between here and the hereafter is so thin, it may be invisible but is spiritually palpable. You may be called to be a Eucharistic Visitor Minister. Taking the Eucharist to the sick of the parish on Sundays after church is a high honor, a profound ministry. On behalf of all those who have been visited over the many years at St. James, I want to thank those women and men who accepted the call to serve God’s people through Eucharistic Visitor ministry.

Preparation for this ministry is being scheduled for the fall. If you think you may be called to be part of our Eucharistic Visitor Ministry, or a Eucharistic Minister who serves during the Celebration of Holy Eucharist—called a Chalice Bearer-- kindly tell me or Father Steve so that we may explore these possibilities with you. And, if you know of anyone who may desire the Eucharist to be brought to them—please also let us know.

### St. Mark’s Pantry

Lastly, on this last Sunday of August, we have a special treat in the form of a visitor from St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in City Heights. When we began the five weeks of preaching on the Discourse on Bread, I asked the parish to bring food—even bread itself—these weeks to put our hands on the theology we read and pray about. Many of you have and we thank

you! Heather Smith will be with us after the 10:00 service in the Van Schaick Room to share more with us about the ministry of food which is central to our Church and the World outreach ministries. The committee has prepared a light lunch for those who attend, and I hope many of you will do so.

Don’t despair if you could not bring food these last few weeks: we collect every Sunday because people are hungry every day in our city and we are equipped to help feed them.

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May we continue to feed those who are hungry. May we continue to pray for those who are hungry. May we encourage all those who seek an abiding spiritual relationship with God, especially for those whose bellies may be full or over full, but who are starving for the abiding love of God in their lives.  
Amen.

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