

## 5th Sunday of Easter – Abide in me (Achurch and On-line) John 15.1-8

*'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.'* (15:4)

There are friends, and there are friends. Fair-weather friends, there when life is good, and real friends, there when the bottom falls out of your world. There are friends you can have a good gossip with – and friends you can call at 2am for help. Jesus is a true friend – he remains a true friend when others may desert us. He's there not just in the good times, but in the tough times. Why? Because he loves us. Listen to his words a few verses beyond our Gospel reading today: 'The greatest love a person can have for his friends is to give his life for them. And you are my friends' (Jn 15.11&12). For Jesus, love is the basis for friendship. He calls his disciples, that's you and me 'friends' – he loves us so much that he gave his life for us.

True friendship is more than knowing someone, its loving someone. What a difference that makes, for where there's love, there's acceptance. It's been said: 'Your friend is someone who knows all about you, and still likes you.' Jesus is that kind of friend – to all who've responded to him and seek to follow him. He knows us through & through, yet he loves us – 'You are my friends' he says.

To make the most of his friendship, we need to develop our relationship with him. Just as our closest & most important relationships with friends & family need to be worked at, so too our relationship with Jesus. We need to ensure that we have time for one another. Jesus teaches this when he speaks of himself as 'the true vine' and his disciples as 'branches' and says: '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.' The Message translation has Jesus say: 'Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you,' Notice the 'imperative' – this is a command. What's more, Jesus uses the present tense – 'keep on abiding in me; living in me.'

This abiding involves a 24/7 relationship. It's not a Sunday only thing – but Sunday to Sunday and every moment in-between. And so it's important that we consciously make time to develop our friendship with Jesus. One traditional term for this is 'Quiet Time'. If we're to 'abide in Jesus' it's not enough to make time for him once a week – we need to make time for him every day and one way we can do this is to develop a daily 'QT.' This is what Jesus did. He made time to speak to his Father. We read in Mark 1.35, that after an extraordinarily busy & demanding time of teaching & healing: 'In the morning,

while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.' What's more, we know this wasn't a one-off event, but part of a pattern.

If Jesus made time to develop his relationship with his Father, then so should we. 'But how much time?' Most of us live very busy lives. 'How much time should we make for Jesus?' I find that a difficult question to answer, for we don't normally measure a relationship in terms of time. But push me and I'd suggest that if you're not used to having a daily 'QT' then a good starting point would be to set aside 10mins somewhere each day for Jesus. Considering there are 1440 minutes in a day that's not too much to ask, is it?

Then you might ask 'What's the best time in the day to devote 10mins to Jesus?' In one sense that's down to each individual. We're all different: some are larks, some are owls. For me, first thing in the morning works best. In Isa 50.4 the unknown Servant of the Lord declares: 'Every morning he makes me eager to hear what he is going to teach me.' But ultimately, it's down to you – the important thing is to discover a time each day that you can set aside 10mins for Jesus. And what do you do in those 10 minutes? Thinking of the vine-branch metaphor, I want to suggest 4 things: 1st we draw fresh energy from Jesus. 'Whoever does not abide in me ... withers' (v6).

As we abide in Jesus, we draw fresh sap from him, so that in turn we are able to bear fruit. Alas, time & again we act as though we're superhuman, as though we had the individual strength for all the demands & challenges of life. But the fact is that without maintaining our relationship with Jesus on a daily basis, we haven't got the strength. The Quaker John Southall wrote: 'We cannot come through life strong and fresh on constant express trains, but we must have places of the Most High, times of waiting upon the Lord.'

2ndly we listen to Jesus. 'abide in me, and my words abide in you' (v7). To abide in Jesus is to allow his word to penetrate our hearts and minds. This means that we need to discipline ourselves to read God's word, meditate on it, and listen to what is being said to us. My experience is that if we are to do this, then we need a system for reading God's Word. There are a variety of ways to do this: going onto the net and downloading the passage for the day. Putting a daily prayer app on your mobile. Using Bible reading notes or one of the many simple commentaries produced by Tom Wright in his series 'The NT for everyone.' But whatever system we use we need to hear what God wants to say to us. We need to allow his word to abide in us. When we read our Bibles, we need to read them with a sense of expectancy that Jesus has something to say to us. Some people find the activity of journaling helps them do this, so they have a note of what they

believe God is saying to them. The important point is that we don't read for the sake of reading, we read for the sake of listening.

3dly we discover Jesus' priorities for the day ahead. As we listen to Jesus, we need to open not just our Bibles, but also our diaries. For Jesus doesn't just want to speak warm & soothing words to us – he also wants to speak words of direction & of command. For just a couple of verses beyond today's Gospel reading Jesus says: 'If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love' (15.10)

Among other things I believe this means we need to discover Jesus' priorities for our lives. 'What does Jesus want me to do in the day that lies ahead?' Is there someone he wants me to speak to? A decision he wants me to take? An action he wants me to do?

4thly, we pray to Jesus. 'If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you' (v7). Prayer is more than asking. Indeed, I'd argue that as we read the Bible & then reflect on what God is saying to us, we are praying; as we open our diaries & ask ourselves what God would have us do in the day ahead, we are praying. For listening to God is praying. But prayer is also about asking.

The fact is that as we spend time with Jesus, we will also want to ask his blessing upon ourselves and others. But our asking needs to flow from spending time with him. It's from our abiding in him that we will make our requests. Which means we won't ask for just anything, e.g. for 50 ice-creams as apparently I once did as a child. 'Anything you wish' doesn't mean Jesus is encouraging us to ask for a Rolls Royce or a yacht; 'anything you will ask' is directly linked to how God wants us to live our lives. Jesus bless me as I seek to live for you & serve you. And, of course, because we are friends of Jesus, we will also want to ask his blessing on others.

So let's make time for Jesus – draw strength from him, listen to him, discover his priorities, ask his blessing on ourselves and on others. This is what it means to 'abide in the vine,' to 'abide in Jesus.' And making time for Jesus need not be desperately time-consuming. It does involve time - I suggest 10 minutes a day at the very least. But then, friendship always involves time. Jesus wants us to be friends with him. So, let's be friends with him. Let's develop our friendship with him. Let's make time for our friendship with Him. Amen