

Easter 6 / B

*An Abode of Love and Joy*

Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17

9 May 2021

*Jesus said to his disciples, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”*

“Abide” is not a word we use much these days. We do not often ask people, “Where do you abide?” I am willing to bet that you will come across the word more times while reading the Gospel of John than you ever will in real-life conversation. In fact, if you read through just the first eleven verses of John 15, you will find the word “abide” is used eleven times.

The sheer repetition of the word reminds us of its importance as a recurring theme throughout John’s Gospel. It revisits an idea that first emerges in the Prologue to the Gospel of John; John 1:14 says, “The Word became flesh and lived among us;” though, as Cynthia Briggs Kittredge points out in *Conversations with Scripture: The Gospel of John*, the Greek should more literally be read that the Word dwelt among us, as in a tent. The Word pitched a tent, or “camped out” among us, and in this more immediate and intimate way showed us the embodiment of God’s love. In the very beginning of Creation, God lovingly walked and talked with Adam in the cool of the evenings. In Jesus’ life, God’s love walked and talked among the people of first-century Galilee and Judea. And in the passage we read today, Jesus is teaching his disciples how to walk in those same shoes, especially once he is no longer able to physically walk around with them. He is preparing them to continue to dwell – to “abide” - in that same godly love, even after he is gone.

Today’s passage may be more familiar to you as part of the Church’s Maundy Thursday services. The reading is part of the long dialogue Jesus shares with the disciples after he has washed their feet at that last Passover meal, just hours before he is handed over to the authorities to be crucified. He is trying to prepare them for his absence and instruct them in

how to continue to live into his ministry, make it their ministry, even when they can no longer see him. “Abide in my love,” he says. “Make my love the house, the tent, the shelter in which you will dwell,” he instructs them.

The word translated as “abide” can also be translated as “remain,” or “stay,” and after the year we have had, we are *very* familiar with those words. After a year of lockdown, quarantine, and physical distancing, we know well what it means to remain, to shelter in place, to stay put. We have become intimately familiar with the inside of our own homes - and maybe with the interior of our own minds - in ways we likely haven’t before. And we have had time to think about what kind of place we want to shelter in. Priorities have shifted or become clearer, prompting changes both small and large. Many people moved in the past year; some left bustling, crowded cities in search of a quieter, slower pace of life and a little more space. Some moved closer to family or closer to wherever feels like “home,” when the need for connection and a support network became impossible to ignore.

And we have had more than a little time to think about what *kind* of home we want and need to abide in. Maybe you’ve added onto your patio to allow for a socially distanced visit with family, friends and neighbors. Perhaps you’ve converted some corner of your home into an office, a craft space, or virtual school room. Or maybe you have simply been faced with how unsuitable your space is for all the demands placed upon it this year.

No matter our circumstances, this year has trained us to have a clearer sense of the depth of the word “abide” in John’s Gospel. We have become uniquely aware of the importance of home, of where we dwell, of how we live within it, and with whom we share it. This year, our home, our tent, our abode has made all the difference, for better or for worse.

To listen to Jesus’ words with our 2021 ears is to be reminded that our homes reflect our priorities, and our home base affects how we live our lives. With this in mind, Jesus’ invitation to “abide in my love” becomes all the more striking. We can imagine Jesus elaborating, “Let my love be the foundation under your feet, let my love permeate the walls that shelter you, and let my love form the roof arching over your head.” Jesus’ encouragement is not only to rest and nest in God’s love, but also to live our lives in such a way that our life clearly reflects the fact that love built the

house we live in - to live in such a way that when others see our actions and interactions, it's clear that love drew the blueprint.

And yet, just as building or making a home takes time, so does learning to let love be our home base. The disciples hid away in a locked room for a while before they ventured out to share the Good News and carry on Jesus' ministry. They cowered in fear before they realized that abiding in Jesus' love wasn't so much about the physical space they inhabited, or his physical presence with them, as much as it was about the way they lived, how they dwelt, among others.

For us, too, this passage can serve to remind us that whether home has been a refuge and comfort in the past year, or a place we couldn't wait to leave, we also – and always - have a home in the love of God, in the love that is God. It's a loving and joyful home we carry with us, like a tent, ready to be pitched whenever and wherever God's love is needed among us and between us.

This abode of love and joy shows up when we remember God's love for us and when we treat others as God's beloved.

It shows up when we create a loving space to really listen to someone else, to be present with them in their need or struggle. That space is a home built by love.

It shows up when we contribute toward building a shelter for those without homes. That effort creates a space for love to dwell.

This dwelling of love and joy shows up when we alter our habits to show more care for creation. That shift adds room for love to abide.

It shows up in small kindnesses between strangers and friends alike.

It shows up when we respond graciously to someone who disagrees with us.

It shows up in all the ways, large and small, that we allow the love of God to guide us.

This tent, this abode, this dwelling, this home of built of love is recognizable because, though it may involve sacrifice, it is also permeated with joy. As Jesus says to the disciples, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” Jesus knows that there is fullness of life to be found in abiding in love, and that though his disciples’ lives may be marked by hardship, all who abide in God’s love experience the deep joy of dwelling there.

So, just as we have learned to stay and to remain this year, may we also learn to “abide”: learn to abide in God’s ever-present love, a gracious and hospitable dwelling, permeated with joy.

Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.