



ST. MICHAEL'S SERMONS

Greenville, SC
Easter 6 - B – May 21, 2006
John 15:9-17

ABIDE IN MY LOVE

"Abide in My love!" says Jesus. "As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you. Abide in My love!"

The word means to *stay*, to *remain*, to *endure*, to *continue*, to *dwell*. In certain Southern dialects, the question "Where do you stay?" means not just the location of your residence, but where you live, where you are at home, where you dwell, the place you always go back to, the place I can find you when I need you. "Abide in My love," says Jesus. *Stay* in My love; *dwell* in My love; *live* in My love; and find life and home, your safe and saving center in My love; and always be found there whenever anyone is looking for you. "As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you. Abide in My love."

Jesus is continuing the metaphor of the vine and the branches, helping us understand what He wants us to do – since we are not really grape vine branches, but only symbolically. Mothers' Day was last week, but the umbilical gospel of our belly-button goes on forever: We depend upon God for life; and the fruit God wants from us is love – "Abide in My love!"

Jesus speaks these words after the Last Supper and before His arrest and crucifixion. They are "bottom line," "cut to the chase," poignant and powerful final instructions . . . "Abide in My love." You and I hear these words on the Sixth Sunday of Easter – the lilies have faded away; the trumpets are silent; we've been doing Easter for five whole weeks, now; school is almost out, and we're already in Summer mode. And Jesus says, "Abide in My love!" This Thursday is Ascension Day, the 40th day of Easter, that odd liturgical feast which marks Jesus' absence from a particular physical place to enable Jesus' presence in every place. His Church is soon to be orphaned, with only the promise of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus says, "Abide in My love!" You and I hear these words well into the 21st century, in a consumer culture which seems to want more and more to access Jesus as one would access the services of a health club, or access the internet; and in the same week in which a controversial movie has opened which will make millions upon millions feeding upon our culture's seeming desire to believe that everything and everyone is a lie. "Abide in My love!" says Jesus.

"As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you. Abide in My love!" Just like the football player on zone defense needs to "stay home" and avoid falling prey to offensive maneuvers designed to pull him away, so Jesus calls His Church – and you and me as His disciples – to stay home, to live and find life in, to remain and dwell in His love. "Abide in My love!" Abide in My love for you . . . and in your love for Me.

Abide in My love for you – which is agape love; determined love; decisive love; love which decides to behave in loving ways, regardless of how it may or may not feel, and regardless of the worthiness of the recipient; steadfast, steady, strong love which expresses itself through mercy and lovingkindness, which takes on form and flesh in the baby born at Bethlehem Who dies for us on a Cross and is raised to new life. "Abide in My love!"

In My love for you. And in your love for Me. Love which takes on form and flesh, becomes visible and tangible and touchable and makes a real difference as you love one another. "This is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you!" This love divine creates the Church! And this love divine defines the Church – without it there is no Church – as it flows from God the Father to Jesus the Son to us the people of God, and back and forth amongst us through the grace of the Holy Spirit in our *community* in Christ, our *communion* in Christ, our *abiding* in Christ!

The pastor asks the engaged couple, "Would you be willing to die for each other?" After much silent soul-searching, the answer is "Yes!" Yes, I would. And yes, I would. And the pastor says, "Then you should have no problem moving over every day, giving up your *self* for the sake of your spouse, so that each of you creates a space in the center for your marriage to grow in Christ, and for Christ to grow in your marriage!" "Abide in My love!"

Jesus' teaching compels us to be and to become a church centered in this divine, defining love, which understands that this Eucharistic feast is not finished as long as there are out there in the world around us people who are hungry or lonely; which understands that this worship service which ends the week also begins the week of worshipful service loving one another as Jesus loves us. "Abide in My love!" Jesus' teaching compels us to be and to become a church in which teachers keep on teaching and leaders keep on leading and workers keep on working and givers keep on giving, even when their own children are grown, because you want for the children of others the same living faith you want for your own children; so that Allison can come up in last week's children's sermon and tell the assembled congregation the story of her own Baptism, and Rachel can pray publicly; so that another generation of high-schoolers can go to a national youth gathering to see and to experience the bigness of God's Church before they launch into the bigness of the adult world; and even so that we focus from time to time on "planned giving," so that our resources can support the ministry of Christ's Church literally forever. "Abide in My love!" Jesus' teaching compels us to be and to become the kind of church in which Ralph and Mary can go to Mississippi and move shingles, while Smitty and Lacy are mucking out houses, while Randy and Robert are moving mattresses, while David and Carol are cooking meals; to be and become the kind of church in which some of us have actually met a homeless person, and know that they have a name and a story, and have eaten and drunk with them in our own Fellowship Hall. "Abide in My love!"

This past Tuesday morning, I had coffee before breakfast with a group of pastors attending the team-building conference for the rising interns at our Lutheran seminary in Columbia. One of the pastors was from Mobile, Alabama, and was there to build a team with an intern couple who are being funded by Lutheran Disaster Relief to work with Lutheran congregations along the Gulf coast of Alabama. He told us that several months ago one of the South Asian fishermen who are so prevalent in that region – and who are, of course, all Buddhist – came to him and one of his members and said, "I want to become a Christian!" They asked him "Why?" He said, "Because the only ones doing anything to help are the Christians!" Now it would be tempting for us to pat ourselves on the back and say, "Yeah for us Christians!" And that would be "OK". But the witness of this story is in fact a call for us to jump on the mission bus, to be about the work of doing deeds of love and mercy, to be about the business of abiding in Christ's love!

And so we sing this morning, "Finish then Thy new creation . . . ," knowing full well that **we** are that new creation, and that we are not yet finished!

"Abide in My love!"

AMEN