

EASTER FIVE, MAY 2, 2021

Many of us probably recall the Simon and Garfunkel hit song from 1964 "The Sounds of Silence". In the third verse the words say:

In the naked light I saw / ten thousand people, maybe more / People talking without speaking/ People hearing without listening/ people writing songs that voices never share / no one dared/ disturb the sounds of silence.

The songs' main theme is people's inability to communicate with each other. Paul Simon uses the imagery of light and darkness to show how people's ignorance and apathy destroys their ability to communicate even on simple levels. He believes there is no serious understanding because there is no serious communication - "people talking without speaking - hearing without listening". No one dares take the risk of reaching out to disturb the sound of silence.

In essence he is saying people are not breaking down the barriers to seriously interact with each other. They are not taking the time to develop depth to their relationships. It is so easy not to listen to anyone else but your own voice which can be isolating. When we don't interact on a meaningful basis, we lose our capacity for compassion, empathy and we don't care about others or their needs.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." This passage is all about connection.

The one key word that captures this metaphor so succinctly is the word abide. We kind of think of it as an old fashioned word. It certainly isn't a word we use very often today except perhaps in church. Abide is about a union so strong, so intermeshed, that you can't think of one without the other. Think of it this way, abide means to immerse ourselves wholly in something, to allow something to captivate our heart and life and to view our whole existence through that one lens.

So, I began to wonder if there is anything that would make a person give him or herself wholly to one thing that controls or consumes them? But then I thought about the things that we do give ourselves to: our jobs, our families, hobbies, interests or other activities.

Let's face it we all know those sports fans who dress up, go to all the games and can't live without their sports fix. Or it can even be a TV program that we binge-watch and then can't wait till the next season begins.

So, as it turns out, we are constantly abiding--constantly living in, or fixing ourselves permanently on many things in our lives. Our abiding also speaks to our rooting, in other words, what are the things that we have let take root in our lives.

We kid ourselves if we think that those things that take root in us are not affecting us, shaping us, and transforming us. The evidence of this is all around us. Just think of all the things we value, that we spend our time doing, the activities that we engage in, our attitudes and ways of engagement. Those things that we let our lives revolve around. They all speak to the things that captivate our hearts. These things are the fruit of our abiding, the fruit of our rootedness.

Now ask yourselves this, what do you pay attention to on a daily basis? Where is your focus? What consumes most of your energy on a daily basis? What things in your life are so important that it takes precedence over anything else? Now, ask yourselves,

where am I abiding? Where am I truly rooted? Am I abiding in Jesus? And am I letting Jesus abide in me?

Naturally, we all want to say, "Of course, I abide in Jesus. Of course, Jesus abides in me!" This seems like the answer that any good Christian would give. But if we're honest, we have to recognize that we often do not abide in Jesus.

Let's face it, it is easier to abide in things that we think we can control or in things that require little of us. But in the end they end up controlling us.

Perhaps, we abide in the security of our small ideas about God, and believe our abiding seems fruitful but in essence the fruit we are producing is rotting grapes and grapes that are unable to produce the real love of God's kingdom. These rotten grapes are our myopic view of the world where God only loves those that we love and God hates the ones we hate. These are grapes that keep us from paying attention to the needs of others and perpetuates an individualist and egocentric community. These are grapes that refuse to put ourselves in the place of the other and to live alongside them.

These are the grapes that have produced divisiveness, our unwillingness and inability to listen and to see other points of view. These are the grapes that produce caricatures of others that are different from us. All this shows us that none of this is abiding in Jesus. None of this!

We have allowed fear, ignorance, and our limited understanding of God to take root in our souls. We have chosen to allow our souls to become rooted in a religious version of ourselves instead of being rooted in God's abiding love.

In my former parish in Denville the Pentecost season set had a green frontal with a cross in the center and a vine wrapped around the cross and then extending outwards. When you looked closer you could see that the vine was solidly anchored in the base of the cross. We need to abide and be anchored in the teachings, life and love of Christ.

Jesus says, "Come and open yourself up to being grafted to me. I have strong roots. I have the DNA needed to make you fruitful, alive, and to make you flourish, to make all of creation flourish."

The Christian way of life can be summed up in this one word – abide. We have only one task: *to abide*. To tarry, to stay, to cling, to remain, to depend, to rely, to last, to persevere, to commit, to continue, to tolerate, to endure, to acquiesce, to accept. To hang in there for the long haul. To make ourselves at home.

As one theologian put it; Abide is a tricky word. It's passive on the one hand, and active on the other. To abide is to stay rooted in place. But it is also to grow, to change, and to multiply. It's a vulnerable-making verb: if we abide, we'll get pruned. It's a risky verb: if we abide, we'll bear fruit that others will see and taste. It's a humbling verb: if we abide, we'll have to accept nourishment that is not of our own making. And it's a relentlessly communal verb — if we abide, we will have to coexist with our fellow branches. We will have to live a life that is messy, crowded, tangled, and gorgeous. A life that's deeply rooted and wildly fertile.

"I AM the vine," Jesus said. "You ARE the branches." To be a branch means that our lives are bound up in his and in each other's. We are called to be a part of the vine and live in relationship with each other no matter how messy and entangled life might get.

Where do you abide? Where do you sink your roots? Where do you find life giving spiritual nourishment and deep meaning? Do you abide in Christ? For when we root ourselves in God in Christ, God wants nothing more than to hold you tight and ground

your life in all that is true and meaningful. Take time to abide in God, in prayer, reflection and in serving others.

Yes, it's difficult. But it's also easy. This is what we were made for. Abide. Amen.