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John 15:9-17

## Abide in Love

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Easter 6B

Happy Mother's Day to all women of the congregation. Mom, Aunt, Sister--love is the way that we show others we care. *Jesus said to his disciples, "As God 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 God's commandments and abide in God's 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?" You will likely 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 (NRSV), you will find the word eleven times. This sheer repetition reminds us of its importance as a theme in John's Gospel. It revisits an idea that 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 is more literally that the Word dwelt among us as in a tent. The Word pitched a tent or "camped out" among us and showed us the embodiment of God's love. 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 shoes, too, especially once he is no longer walking around with them. He is preparing them to continue to dwell in that same love.

Today's passage is part of the long dialogue Jesus shares with the disciples after he has washed their feet and 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, 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 dwell and move around in," he seems to say.

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 what it means to remain. To shelter in place. To stay. 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've had time to think about what kind of place we want to shelter in. Priorities shifted or became clearer, which prompted 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 a neighbor. Perhaps you've converted some corner of your home into an office or virtual school space. 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 sense of the depth of the word "abide" in the Gospel of John. We have become uniquely aware of the importance of home, of where we dwell, and of how we live within it. This year, home has made all the difference, for better or for worse.

To listen to Jesus' words in this passage with 2021-ears is to be reminded that our homes reflect our priorities, and our home base affects how we live our lives. Jesus' invitation to abide in his 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 reflects that love built the house we live in—to live in such a way that when others see our 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—before they realized abiding in Jesus' love wasn't so much about the physical space they inhabited or his physical presence with him as it was about the way they lived 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 have a home in the love of God. It's a home we carry with us, like a tent, and it 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.

It shows up when we alter our habits to show more care for God's creation. That shift adds room for love to abide. On Mother's Day let us remember to care for God's creation, which we call MotherEarth. Take care of our environment--it is the only one we have.

I do quite a lot of reading and I really love it when scientists show what we intuitively have known. It is often a good reminder to us to practice what we have learned. Some years before he died, Dr. William C. Menninger, the co-founder of the world-famous Menninger Clinic of Topeka, Kansas, wrote about "Emotional Maturity" and this essay became the last chapter in a collection of his writings, *Living in a Troubled World*. In the last paragraph of the chapter, he said, "Certainly the world could never before have had more grief and unhappiness and human turmoil than currently exists. We - you and I - must assume some responsibility for reducing this turmoil ... We dare not continue letting our inability to get along with each other destroy our cities, our gadgets, ourselves. What gain to be scientific geniuses if we remain social imbeciles? The responsibility for achieving social and emotional maturity ... lies entirely with you and me. What will you do about it?"

In this chapter, Menninger proceeds to set out "seven standards that you can apply to your daily life and relationships with other people in order to judge how emotionally mature - how effective - you are." The seventh standard on his list is "the need to love." He writes, in part: "Along with the instinctive drive to hate, we also have an instinctive drive to love. It must be allowed a chance to express itself. The only neutralization we know for hate is love, love in the broad sense, love that makes me want to do something constructive rather than destructive. This business of learning how to love is probably the most important lesson anyone learns in life, if she/he is fortunate enough to have learned it."

Our love 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 home 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: to abide in God's ever-present love, a gracious and hospitable dwelling, permeated with joy. Amen.