

Interactive lesson



picture from <https://minnetonkaorchards.com/how-to-prune-grapevines/>

What is pruning? <Let them respond >

Why is it done? <Let them respond; increase yields, reduce disease, reduce transplant shock, increase air flow, manageable size >

Is it done haphazardly? How is it done?
<Let them respond>

Do you think the tree or bush likes getting pruned?
<Let them respond>

How does the plant respond to pruning?
<Let them respond>

We are going to hear about getting pruned by God. Why do you think God would prune us? <Let them respond>

What do you think getting pruned by God looks like?
Is it fun for us? <Let them respond>

How have you been pruned by God? <Let them respond>

How did you – and how do people in general – respond to getting pruned by God? <Let them respond>

In all that you live through, may you hold fast to Jesus, bearing fruit for our Creator through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Gospel lesson

In this week's Gospel lesson, Jesus continues to teach the disciples after the Last Supper, before going to the garden.



picture from <https://pixabay.com/photos/grapes-vines-grapevine-vineyard-2656259/>

John 15:1-8 (NRSV)

¹ "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.

² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.

³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

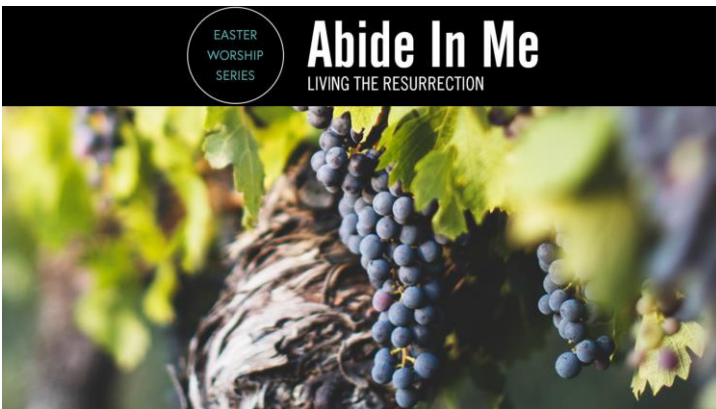
⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

The word of God for the people of God

<Hymn "Walk with Me" TFWS #2242>

Message: Abide in Me



picture adapted from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/living-the-resurrection/fifth-sunday-of-easter-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/fifth-sunday-of-easter-year-b-graphics>

Please pray with me?

Eternal source of all life, with us in all times and all places, as we pause now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

that we may **experience** You more clearly, love You more dearly, and thus follow You more nearly. Amen.



This week we consider “Living the Resurrection” according to Jesus’s words, “Abide in me.” In summary:

“We are practicing this abiding in Christ as we worship together with the hope that it will continue after the benediction is pronounced and the postlude ends. Cultivating habits for lifelong worship is a part of what we do when we gather for worship – however we gather these days.”

“Abide in me.” Jesus said that five times in today’s Gospel reading; He was making an important point!

So what, exactly, is “abiding”? Other translations list “Abide in me” (NRS, RSV, ASV, DBY, ESV, JUB, RHE, TMB, WBT, KJV) as “Remain in me” (CEB, CSB, HNV, LEB, NCV, NIV, NLT, OJB, WEB, YLT), “Continue in me” (WNT), “Stay united with me” (CJB), “Remain united to me” (GNTA), “Live in me” (GW), “Make your home in me” (MSG), “Dwell ye in me” (WYC), “Remain joined to me” (NIRV), and “Be in me” (BBE).

All of those speak to me of our relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not a one-way relationship

though; He spoke of abiding in us too. It is a sharing of our beings, a oneness in spirit with our Savior. This is a far different emphasis than the Old Testament's focus on obedience to the law.



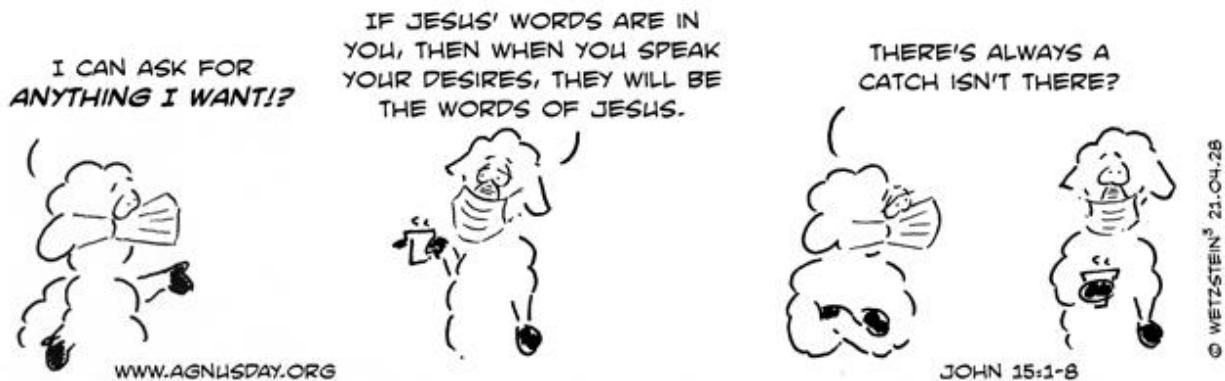
picture from <https://davesgarden.com/guides/articles/pruning-and-maintaining-your-grape-vines>

In both the Old and New Testaments, God is the vinegrower. The Old Testament describes Israel as the vine, implying that only Abraham's descendants, the Chosen people, are of value to God. But Jesus is the true vine – the one who enables all people to live with value, as children of God.

In the Old Testament, the people were uprooted and replanted by God, sometimes withering when they forgot to stay connected to their Source of life. Jesus lives, resurrected, and He brings life from the Source closer to all of us; with Christ as our vine, we need never fear uprooting.

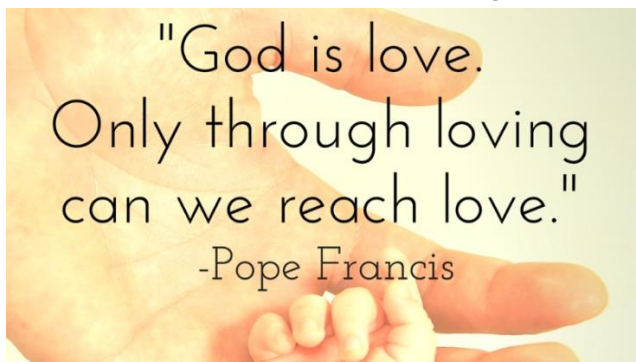
Healthy branches with a strong connection to the vine produce fruit. For Christians, “bearing fruit” can mean both showing love to one another and proclaiming Christ in mission to the world. Jesus promises to support this by supplying what we ask for – but it is

not a blank check that includes anything sinful.
This cartoon explains:



<https://www.agnusday.org/comics/952/john-15-01-08-2021>

So God blesses us when we stay in close relationship with Him. And that relationship is one full of love, as the apostle John described in the part of his letter that we read today.



picture from <http://www.franthony.com/blog/god-is-love>

“...God is love.” (1 John 4:8) I have already mentioned that God is the source of all life. If God is love, then the only way we can live is through love – loving God and loving one another.

We know that the richest blessings come from the loving relationships we have in our lives, typically our family and our close friends. How much more

blessed we are when we are in a loving relationship with our Creator, Redeemer, Counselor!

“...if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us...” (1 John 4:12-13)

Here we see that the fruit of abiding in Jesus is love – not just declarations of love, but service to those we love, especially when we are inconvenienced by or have to put out it.

Love is taking care of the sick child who just threw up all over you and the chair and the floor, cleaning them up and getting them settled with comforting and a kiss, and then cleaning up the rest of the mess.

Love is gently reassuring the parent developing dementia while helping them sort out the latest mess they got into inadvertently (while they were trying to fend for themselves as they did effectively for so many years), even when they lash out verbally at you.

Love is listening while your spouse vents, defusing their anger by accepting their feelings and then helping them to work toward a better situation.

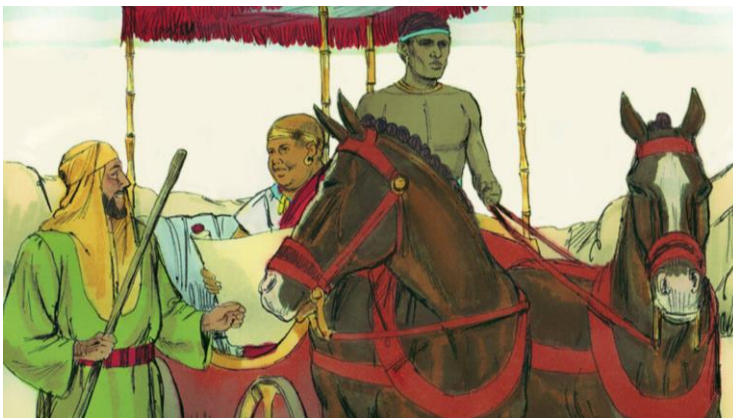
There are so many more examples to give – you have lived far more of them than I could mention in a day. Jesus was the ultimate example of how to live in perfect love for God and for others.

“We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

John Wesley noted that this verse “is the sum of all religion, the genuine model of Christianity.”¹

We live because of God’s grace, God’s love for us. In response, like a child copies their parent, our souls seek the divine and try to copy that love.

This soul-seeking is present in every culture around the world. Everywhere there have been people, worship of a greater power has developed. And our Creator has been teaching His children the truth over the course of millenia.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/philip-ethiopian/>

The eunuch from Ethiopia was trying to learn about God, so the Spirit sent Philip to help. It was not until Philip abided with him to explain about Jesus that the eunuch understood the scriptures.

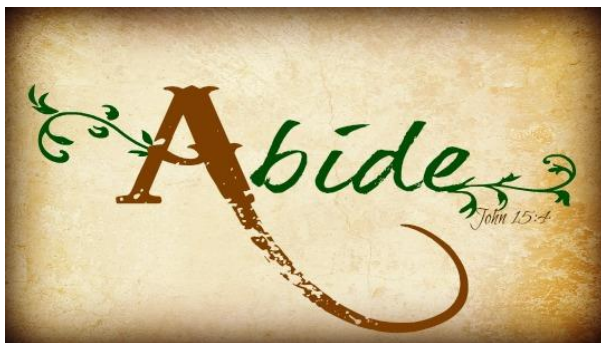
Because Philip abided in Jesus (and Jesus abided in him), the Spirit was able to use him to help others seeking God. Upon abiding with Philip, the eunuch was able to learn about God and to receive the Spirit

¹ <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/notes-on-the-first-epistle-of-st-john/>

into his heart - to abide in Jesus and have Jesus abide in him.

This was important beyond just the one man. According to the law in Deuteronomy, castrated men were not allowed to be part of the Israelite assembly. They were sidelined, a lesser class. The eunuch may have been wondering if the sheared lamb, denied justice, was talking about a eunuch.

By having the eunuch baptized and receive the Spirit as a full member of the body of Christ, God was proclaiming the full heavenly citizenship status for all of those who similarly [lived on the fringe of society, but repented of sin and turned to God for life]. The scripture does not say his body was healed; it continues to refer to him as a eunuch. But his soul was blessed and he went on his way rejoicing, because now he abided in Jesus and Jesus abided in him.



picture from <https://believinginchristjesus.wordpress.com/2014/02/04/abide-abide-abide-abide/>

Take time to abide in Jesus, that you may have a more blessed life. Take time to abide with others in the love of God - not just on Sunday mornings but throughout every day. Tell others what you know about

Jesus, that they too may come to abide in the Lord and the Lord in them.

Now let us respond with
<Doxology>

<Prayer of Dedication and Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

God of the far-flung universe and God who is closer than our own heartbeat: we long to dwell in your closeness, abiding in you and you abiding in us.

However, the call to abide in other places is strong: to abide in the world of popularity and acceptance or in the world of increasing wealth and power centered around our own wants and desires.

As we offer our gifts and ourselves to you, help us turn away from other calls and abide in that place of heart's deepest desire: in your Son, Jesus, and he in us.

Give us wisdom and strength of resolve as we go about our daily lives. And help us, Lord, with:

- Healing touch and comfort for all who are ailing.
 - Coronavirus victims - isolated; school; out-of-work; health care workers (especially: Marie Curri, Laura Davis, Nicole Marshall, Vince Marshall, Heidi Newton, Jennifer Tibbens-Scalzo) & those serving critical needs
 - **Gary Sweet** - radiation therapy & home issues
 - **Shelly Beckwith** - cancer
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- Thanks for
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- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
 - Travelers
 - Family far off
- Social unrest - dismantle racism and reform systems
- Guide our Leaders - local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.
- Help us to be fearless in talking about our faith as a normal part of daily living.
 - For the sake of this our local church, one part of Your great church, guide each one of us this week to invite someone to come know You better.
 - Help us to encourage one another toward faith in You and toward living together in true Christian community.

All these things we pray in Your holy name, Amen.

<Communion>

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.

- † You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.
- † When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.
- † You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and set before us the way of life.

<slide change>

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.

- † By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection you gave birth to your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

- † By your great mercy we have been born anew
 - to a living hope through the resurrection of your Son from the dead and
 - to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.
- † Once we were no people, but now we are your people, declaring your wonderful deeds in Christ, who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

When the Lord Jesus ascended, he promised to be with us always, in the power of your Word and Holy Spirit.

<hold hands out over bread/elements>

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:
“Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

<hold hands out over juice/elements>

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:
“Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

On the day you raised him from the dead he was recognized by his disciples in the breaking of the bread,

and in the power of your Holy Spirit your Church has continued in the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup.

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,

<slide change>

we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.
Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

<hold hands out over elements>

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on
on these gifts of bread and juice.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each
other, and one in ministry to all the world, until
Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his
heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit
in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours,
almighty God, now and forever.

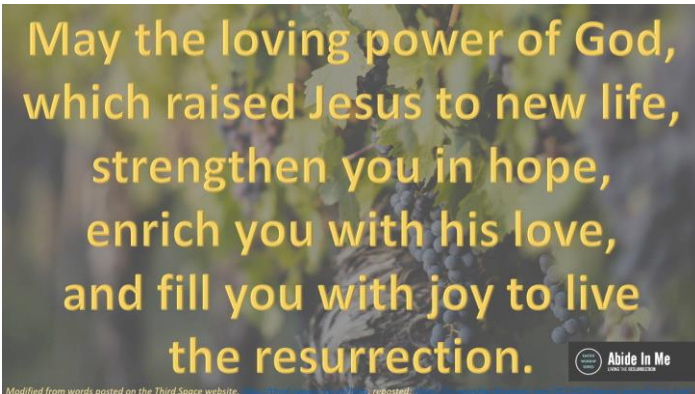
Amen.

<Lord's Prayer>

<Serving of the elements>

<Hymn "He Lives" UMH #310>

<Benediction>²



background from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/Living-the-resurrection/fifth-sunday-of-easter-year-b-lectionary-planning-notes/fifth-sunday-of-easter-year-b-graphics>

May the loving power of God,
which raised Jesus to new life,
strengthen you in hope,
enrich you with his love,
and fill you with joy
to live the resurrection:

pruned by the Father, abiding in the Son, and bearing
fruit as the Holy Spirit guides you. Amen.

² Modified from words posted on the Third Space website. <http://third-space.org.uk/blog>, reposted: <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/02/easter-benediction.html>.