

“The Dude Abides”



The Rev. Ryan Wiksell

April 28, 2024 | 5th Sunday of Easter

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

Independence, MO

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God.

- In my newsletter commentary I talked about an old-fashioned word: “steward”
 - It’s a good word for Christians to ponder
 - It implies selfless service, but it goes beyond that
 - A steward is someone who takes responsibility and accepts accountability, without seeking wealth, vying for power or trying to control others
 - There is no limit to the number of stewards a community might have
 - On the strongest teams, every single member is a steward.
- That’s why we refer to church giving as “stewardship”
 - Every one of us can take responsibility for making this place thrive
 - In fact, it can’t thrive unless we view it that way
 - Top-down churches are unsustainable
 - Cult-of-personality churches are toxic
 - There is no sense of stewardship there
 - It may be an old-fashioned term, but we Episcopalians love those.
 - So let’s always remember to think of ourselves not just as members, but as stewards.
- There’s another old-fashioned word confronting us this morning
 - The word “abide”
 - I can only think of two characters in history that emphasized this word.
 - One real, and one fictional. The real one is Jesus, and the fictional one is: Jeffrey Lebowski. a.k.a. The Dude, from The Big Lebowski
 - It’s probably the most famous and quotable thing the character says, and he doesn’t say it till the very end of the movie
 - “The Dude Abides”

- Then a narrator, called The Stranger, responds to this utterance with a bit of commentary
- “The Dude abides. I take comfort in that. It’s good knowin’ he’s out there, the Dude, takin’ ‘er easy for all us sinners.”
- Why does the Stranger call himself (and the rest of us) sinners? The Dude abides, on behalf of all of us, the sinners?
- Perhaps it’s because The Dude knows how to abide, and we don’t.
- It might seem like it’s easy for him, since the Dude is a slacker. He doesn’t go looking for drama
- But the whole movie is about how drama finds him
- After a very convoluted series of events, one of his two best friends dies
- It’s a whole lot to go through
- But in the end, the Dude is back at the bowling alley, with a ball in his hand, abiding.
- When the Dude abides, it is comforting. Like the Stranger said.
 - But it’s comforting in kind of a passive way.
 - There’s a sense of detachment there – as if we can separate ourselves from the events of our own lives
 - Whatever happens, we can let it go. Ignore it. Move on.
- When Jesus abides, I think it’s a little different
 - Because he doesn’t just say “The Lord abides.”
 - He says “I abide *in you*. So abide in me.”
 - We miss that first part quite a bit, don’t we?
 - We remember that Jesus tells us to abide in him
 - But we forget that Jesus abides in us. That’s the whole premise.
 - Jesus has chosen to abide in us first, *then* invited us to abide in him.
 - That’s why he says “abide in me *as* I abide in you.”

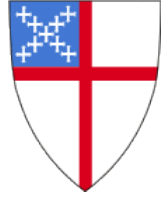
- So what does it mean for us to abide in Jesus?
 - What it doesn't mean, is detachment. To ignore the events of our lives
 - Or to pretend like we don't care about ourselves or others
 - It's the opposite of what we usually do, which I would call *attachment*
 - We get all tied up in knots over what happens to us, and around us
 - We run ourselves around in circles trying to decide what to say and do
- On one end we have detachment, and the other end, attachment
 - But which is better, running off the right side of the road, or the left?
 - What if we looked at our abiding in Jesus as a third choice? A middle way?
 - Some might call that middle way "unattachment" or "non-attachment"
 - Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine, so how would unattachment work there?
 - Think of it this way: It is a branch's job to bear fruit, right?
 - But what if that branch woke up every morning, afraid that it wouldn't have enough nutrients from the soil to produce fruit
 - So the branch tried to reach down and get those nutrients on its own
 - That's ridiculous, right?
- The branch is connected to the vine. It abides in the vine, trusting that the vine will provide it everything that's needed to bear fruit.
 - Detachment means the vine stops caring about the nutrients, or the fruit
 - Attachment means the vine thinks it has to do everything, and do it just right.
 - Unattachment is a blend of trust and agency.
- When we stay connected to Jesus, as our vine, we can trust that we will have what we need
 - AND... we have the agency to produce fruit. To do real good in the world
 - That is when we know what it means when Jesus invites us to "abide"

- Maybe the Stranger is being a little hard on himself, and all of us, when he uses the word “sinners”
 - If we feel guilty for our failures to abide, then we’ll never learn it
 - Let’s accept that it’s a process – a journey
 - The Dude abides... and so can we.
- And in the end it actually starts to sound just like Stewardship
 - We are not trying to be the King, just the Steward. And that’s just fine.
 - The King has ultimate responsibility to make sure the resources are there
 - The Steward simply trusts in that, then turns around to make good use of them. To bear fruit.
- I hope that, as we ponder the word Stewardship in this season, we will think of it as abiding. As non-attachment.
 - Rejecting the anxiety that comes from attachment, and the isolation that comes from detachment
 - And instead, choose to abide.
- Let’s declare that right now. Altogether, let’s each say our first name, followed by abides. Ready? “_____ abides.”
 - Susan abides. Larry abides. Mindy abides. Ryan abides. I take comfort in that.
 - Amen.

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Year B
RCL



Acts 8:26-40
1 John 4:7-21
John 15:1-8
Psalm 22:24-30

The Collect

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The First Lesson

Acts 8:26-40

An angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

The Response

Psalm 22:24-30

Deus, Deus meus

- 24 My praise is of him in the great assembly; *
I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.
- 25 The poor shall eat and be satisfied,
and those who seek the LORD shall praise him: *
"May your heart live for ever!"
- 26 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, *
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.
- 27 For kingship belongs to the LORD; *
he rules over the nations.
- 28 To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship; *
all who go down to the dust fall before him.
- 29 My soul shall live for him;
my descendants shall serve him; *
they shall be known as the LORD's for ever.
- 30 They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn *
the saving deeds that he has done.

The Epistle

1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; 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, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The

commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

The Gospel

John 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 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. 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. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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