

SERMON FOR MAY 9, 2021

TEXT: JOHN 15: 9-17

THEME: ABIDING IN LOVE

**9** As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. **10** If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. **11** These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. **12** "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. **13** Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. **14** You are my friends if you do what I command you. **15** No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. **16** You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. **17** These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

In the name of Jesus:

Once there was a man whose nickname was Mr. Will Power. As his nickname suggests, he could do anything that he set his mind out to do. He was a champion of mind over matter. He had the ability to withstand hot and cold. People dared him to walk over a hotbed of fiery coals, which he did with no problem. They dared him to submit his body to freezing cold temperatures which he adapted to with no issue whatsoever. On another occasion, he was challenged to stay awake for 48 hours by sitting and staring straight ahead for

the duration of the challenge. Again, for him, it was an issue of mind over matter. “You can do anything,” he would say, “if you just put your mind to it.”

And then they got to him, they got him with a simple dare. They dared him to stay alive through sheer will power alone. No food, no nourishment, just some water to keep his mouth moist. A dare is a dare and it was a dare that Mr. Will Power could not resist. You can guess the outcome. There was no way that he would be able to stay alive by the sheer act of his will. But he tried, oh how he tried, he tried with every fiber of his being. But it was the last dare he ever accepted. This one last dare did him in, and the moral of the story is this: there are some things that will power can not do.

Just as Mr. Will Power could not use willpower to live, so also the followers of Jesus cannot use willpower to have a life with God or produce a life filled with fruits pleasing to God. This is what Jesus was saying when He said, “I am the vine you are the branches, He who abides in me and I in him he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” (John 15).

There is a mistaken notion among many today who think that being a follower of Jesus is simply a matter of willpower. Christianity for many is a matter of just setting your mind to living for Jesus and then that is how it takes

place. “It is a matter of will power, we can do anything if we just put our minds to it.”

The rental car company, Avis, had a slogan which said, “we try harder.” It was their way of saying that you should do business with Avis because they try harder. And for some Christians, the only difference between Christianity and other religions is that Christians try harder to live for God.

But that is not what Jesus says. Following Jesus is not about putting our mind over matter, because there are things that simple willpower can not and is not able to do. Just as no person can will to live so also followers of Jesus cannot will themselves into following Him. The key to following Jesus, the key to living for Him, is to abide in Him. This is the theme of John 15, where Jesus continually tells His followers to “Abide in Me.”

To set the scene, Jesus is telling this to His disciples on the night of His betrayal. In a few short hours, He will be betrayed by Judas, tried by Pilate, crucified, die, and be buried in a tomb. And then, He will rise again in His glorious resurrection. This is what Jesus is referring to when He says, ‘in a little while and you will not see me, and again in a little while you will see Me.’ (John 16:17). Soon, very soon, Jesus will die, and soon after Jesus will rise again. And when He ascends into heaven, to take His rightful place as King of

Kings and Lord of Lords, His followers will no longer physically be with Jesus. So how can they continue to follow Him and live for Him? Jesus answers by telling them to “Abide in Me.”

Being a Christian is a matter of abiding in Jesus. So how do we abide in Jesus? Jesus takes care of that, in that He has come down from heaven to abide with us. Christ took on our flesh to be like us to abide with us, to live as we live yet without sin. This is why Jesus is called Immanuel, which means God is with us. God is with sinners in that He sent His Son to save sinners. We who have been separated from God because of our sins have now been made His children in the waters of our Baptism. In Baptism He has made you a part of His family, for if anyone is baptized into Christ that person has put on Christ. Christ lives in and through you in Baptism.

And Jesus comes to you to forgive you, to bless you, to strengthen you, to abide with you in His Word and in His communion. Jesus abides in us when we hear His word, for faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. And faith is strengthened when you continue to hear the Word of Christ.

And that faith is strengthened and we continue to abide in Jesus when we continue to receive His true Body and Blood in Communion. In

Communion Jesus comes to us, communes with us, lives with us and abides in us. This is precisely the point He is making when He tells His disciples to abide in Him when He institutes Holy Communion. We abide in Jesus when we go to Communion, for He is the vine, and we are His branches, He abides in us when we commune with Him, and He empowers us to live for Him in our communing with Him. He tells us to go to communion often for as often as we eat and drink the Supper we proclaim Christ until He comes again. We when come to receive His gifts in the Supper, we allow Him to come into our lives again and again, so that He abides in us and we abide in Him.

Mother's Day is when we celebrate the love of our mother's and we honor our moms. A mother's love comes from the heart. There is no will power involved, a mother loves unconditionally, with no strings attached. The one thing we can rely on is our mother's love. To abide in that love and to trust that she will always love us. Moms will stand by us and support us and love us, no matter what. One aspect of celebrating that love is seen on Mother's Day, a day we set aside to say a simple thank you for all that they have done for us. And yet, for those of us whose moms have died and gone to be with the Lord, we live in their love and abide in their love when we practice the love that they have showed and showered upon us in their lives.

The love of mother's is a simple reflection of the love of Jesus. Jesus loves you unconditionally, no strings attached. And He will continue to love us forever. He invites you and me to abide in His love, to live in His love, and then to share His love with and for others, for in doing so we say thank you to God, honoring Him by loving one another even as He has loved us.

Amen