

My sisters and brothers in Christ,

A refresher of our Eastertide road map: on the first 2 Sundays after Easter, we heard about the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus.

Then on the following two Sundays, we heard answers to the question Who Is Jesus? The *Good Shepherd*, the *Good Vine*. And today, we hear more from this Discourse of Jesus: instructions Jesus gave to his disciples (and that includes us) about what they should do, and how they should behave, when he would no longer be physically with them.

This coming Thursday, forty days after Easter, we celebrate Ascension Day – when our Lord was taken up. He is no longer physically with us – but the Holy Spirit is, his first gift to us.

In the text we just heard, Jesus asks us to engage in a couple of relations. One is: to abide in Christ. That is the believer's relation to Christ: to abide in him and to abide in his love. And the second, of course, is love – that comes as no surprise: love is to be the believers' relation to each other. "Love one another as I have loved you."

To abide in Christ and in his love calls us to relinquish self, to relinquish identity, and to become his. That is a tall order – a life-long project. We are in the world temporarily, but we can belong to Christ eternally, so much so that the world hardly exists for us. When we abide in Christ and when we love God – we are no longer totally in the world. We are no longer distinguishable as worldly.

This is part of the process of becoming that starts with our baptism. And we progress throughout our lives in fine tuning who we are in relation to God, in fine tuning in what we abide, fine tuning in sloughing off self... to the point that we humbly submit who we were and who we are totally to God. The process of becoming is truly dynamic.

But being a Christian in the process of becoming is not easy. Discipleship is not easy. In fact, "easy" is an irrelevant value. "Easy" is hardly a New Testament concept. But abiding in God, abiding in Christ, is a relation that we strive to achieve because it is one of life, and of love.

Indeed in this Gospel, Jesus gives us commandments so that his joy can be in us – and that will complete our own joy. As he has loved each of us, so we should love one another. He has shown his love by laying down his life – that is the great sacrifice – the great demonstration of care and willingness to abide in us.

But giving and accepting this love comes at great cost. What is this cost? In my view, to discover this, we need to read the two or three verses following the end of the passage we heard this morning. The lectionary selection ends much too abruptly, and I have trouble with this. It ends in the middle of a thought – and I think we miss the continuity of what Jesus is saying. These additional verses begin (in verse 18) with Jesus saying to his followers: “If the world hates you....” Astounding words. “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you.” (Be aware that when John’s Gospel was written, it was about the time when Jewish followers of Jesus were expelled from the synagogues. They were cast off on their own.) And here we have put before us the great contrast between the love of Jesus and the hate of the world.

Jesus goes on to draw the dichotomy between belonging to the world, and belonging to Christ. And the reason that a person belongs to Christ is this, Jesus said: “I have chosen you out of the world...therefore the world hates you.” This expands what he said in this morning’s passage: “You did not choose me but I chose you.” *“I have chosen you out of the world – therefore the world hates you.”*

I am always struck when I read these lines – and I do not know that I can ever totally grasp what they mean, or their impact. You can contemplate them, you can meditate on them – but they are, in their own way, a mystery that we can never understand completely. We may bask in the assurance of being chosen, but we may be too frail to stand before the glory of it.

Can we imagine this: what it means to be chosen – not just chosen, but chosen *out of the world*? We are pulled out of the world to abide in him and in his love. And so the Christian way is not the way of the world. Worldly values are beside the point – they become irrelevant to our new life of abiding in Christ. We no longer use the world as our standard – we use Christ and what he taught. We die to the world.

We can translate that to what we do here: beware of the secularization of the church and religious practice – beware of using secular values in the church – beware of measuring and judging the sacred by the values of the secular.

It is perplexing to hear occasionally that the Church ought to mirror secular society, the world. Indeed!

Remember:

You are here not as an audience, but *we* are here as a congregation.

You are here not to be entertained, but *we* are here to worship.

And what we do is an offering to God: not to humans

To worship is to let our selves acknowledge the presence of the divine and to place ourselves at the disposal of the divine: our self becomes secondary.

Not my will, but God's. Not my way, but Christ's.

The real question is: whose values and ways do we follow? When we abide in Christ – that is the answer. Unfortunately, this sometimes is submerged in so-called “Christian Values” that are used to bludgeon others. God preserve us from that. God give us God's love instead.

Abiding in Christ, the love of Christ – that love is sacrificial love. We give up our life to embrace a new life. We respond to divine love with our love – and we give up our life for it. This is not just a single act of heroism for our friends, like throwing yourself on the hand grenade.... It is a lifetime of discipleship that challenges us to make daily choices about who we belong to, and who we abide in.

God has chosen. Christ has chosen. We are called to be holy. And so, we also are called to be saints – not necessarily saints with a capital S. But saints nonetheless – even unknown saints, unknown to all but God.

Remember what we prayed in the Collect of the Day: “God, pour into our hearts such love towards you....”

Abide in Christ's love and keep his commandments – and let us be the vessels of God's love. ✝