

Grace Lutheran Church

The Rev. P. Stevens Lynn – Sermon

Sunday, April 29, 2018

Fifth Sunday of Easter - John 15: 1-8

*Grace to you and Peace from God Our Father and
Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen*

The hymn “Abide with Me” is one of Lois’ favorites. I like it too, because she does, and because it gives me a sense of peace and security. And this hymn, Abide with Me Fast Falls the Eventide,” is not just talking about the evening time of day. This hymn is speaking about the evening times of our lives – When things are not going well – when we are weak and vulnerable and even near death.

As you have heard me say: I have had the honor of being with scores of people when they died. I touch their hands or shoulders and whisper words of Gospel into their ears. When I do that I become vulnerable too, as I am so aware of my own limitations and feet of clay as we all face death. But the evening of our life, means anytime, not just death, but anytime we feel weak and insecure and vulnerable. Maybe you’re only 20, but this week’s final exams and papers makes you panic and feel lonely. Maybe you’re 35 and thought the job plan you had for your life, which was so meaningful, is now in question and you feel afraid, or you professors feel the weight of grading all those tests and papers. Maybe you’re 45 and the marriage you promised to be in until you die, well that’s just not possible

anymore and you are petrified for your future. Maybe you're 65 – desperately want to retire – but you can't and you feel boxed in. Maybe you're 75 and facing health issues or a spouse with dementia and you have to leave your home – your place of security for years or you 50 year-olds are helping your parents cope with such issues. Wherever you are, all us are vulnerable and weak and afraid sometimes. And it's worse in the sleeplessness of a dark, lonely night. Does God really abide in you? In our Gospel lessons today, Jesus said: “Abide in me as I abide in you.” The word “abide” is a grand word. To me it has the sense of remaining exactly where you are. Abide here. It means having a dwelling place – an abode – a place of security. It's the staying, remaining – the dwelling that provides comfort. When Jesus said “Abide in me as I abide in you,” he was saying “I have come to make my home in you, now you make your home in me.” In that home, that place, that nest of security with Jesus, there are no orphans; there in Jesus' nest – where you are – no one is excluded – for any reason. Having a place, a sense of home, where one is safe and secure is a necessary basic need for all people.

Three weeks ago, I got word that one of my neighborhood Moms was dying. She's 92. This woman, Mrs. Beck, was so good to me as I was growing up. She's still in her home in Bellwood, being cared for there, and when I walked in, she looked up and said, “Steve, I'm so glad you're here.” I was there to comfort her, to

see how she was, to tell her, maybe for the last time, how much I cared for her.

But as I saw her and she saw me – her eyes, her voice, her smile – calling me by my childhood nick name, I’m the one who automatically returned to a very secure place of comfort, to a place where I am always home. We all need to have a place like that. We all need a place where we are always welcome and comfortable and secure. A place where we can be ourselves with no fear of rejection. I hope your home is that place. I hope Grace is a place like that for you.

But today we all know that for many “home” does not provide that security. Women and children and men are abused in their homes. In Syria and other areas of the world, because of genocide and evil dictators people are fleeing their homes – and as they travel they are hungry and desperate and frightened. They have “no place” to be.

Some of you, or your parents, are at the point that you can no longer stay in your homes safely – and you need to leave your home of many years. For many right now, there is no sense of home and security – no safe place. But the home Jesus makes in us and that we have in him is real, and it is safe and secure. When Jesus abides in us and we in him, we have a safe place – a loving secure place. This home, this place with Jesus is a place where we can be vulnerable, a place where we can be vulnerable, a place where we can make mistakes and know we are still loved and accepted. But the image Jesus gives us today – of abiding in him –

is not one of houses or a physical place. The image Jesus gives in our Gospel lesson is one of a living, growing, intertwining grapevine. “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear fruit – because apart from me you can do nothing.” What a splendid image. Jesus is the root and main vine, sustaining and nurturing all the diverse and “going off” in all directions branches. Those branches that are intertwining and going everywhere – are all of us – with our gifts and differences and diversities and varied interests. Jesus made it clear – he is the life-giving vine – and in order to have the life he is talking about – life abundant – peace – security – we must be attached to him. And what a life-giving attachment it is. You are a branch on Jesus’ vine – you are free to grow and move and do as long as you’re attached to the vine. So that means that you – as long as you’re connected, you can take some growing chances, some risks. That’s an exciting part of life. What is something new you want to try? What old habit do you want to free yourself from? What new ministry do you want to do here? Are you afraid to take that next step in a relationship? Are you hiding something that really keeps you from being who you are? What are you really anxious about? Maybe God has been coaxing you to look at an old issue in a different way? Perhaps you need to take a risk and stretch yourself across the vine. You are secure in Jesus – the vine. Jesus loves you. And you are attached to Jesus – through baptism and in many ways. And as long as you’re attached – your branch

– you – will flourish. Jesus may prune you and me once in a while, but that will only make your branch – you – flourish more. We may have a rough year of growth once in a while. But this is all part of the ebb and flow of life. The rhythm of life with Jesus – attached to the vine, growing in grace, taking some risks and chances, having a great year of growth, having a difficult year for growth, being pruned once in a while – all for the purpose of bearing good fruit for the furtherment of Jesus Christ and his ministry. So don't be afraid. You are the branch attached to Jesus the vine. So stretch out, grow, flourish, take a risk, if something isn't working, try something else, think of something new and different, try something for Jesus you wouldn't normally do. Why? Because you are attached – connected – abiding. You are safe and secure in Jesus' place – the place of being with Jesus. Jesus' love and grace and forgiveness and strength and peace are flowing to you in a never ending supply. Stretch, grow, move, flourish, do, don't be afraid. Jesus abides in you. *Amen.*

(Before we sing the sermon hymn, I am going to call an audible. I'm changing the sermon hymn to one that I think really fits the day. The hymn is #629, Abide with Me.)