



Easter 4

THE NEW SHOFAR

Abiding in Christ brings Christ love to the world

Acts 8:26-40 - John 15:1-8

In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me...

Today's reading from John has a clear theme - *abiding in Jesus*. John presents this vocation as being a fundamental aspect of discipleship. "Abiding in Jesus" is both the source of power and grace for all aspiring disciples as well as being the goal towards which discipleship is

John's picture of Jesus

The *I AM* expression is one he has used previously in this Gospel - *I AM the bread of life* (6:35)..*I AM the light of the world* (8:12). Added together they present a rounded picture and ministry of Jesus, of who he is and what it is he brings from the Father. Using the metaphor of the vine, Jesus declares himself to be the unique form of life and fruitfulness, a life and a fruitfulness earthy achievements can never match. They lead to joy in life, the gift of being able to find cause for rejoicing in all that takes place in life.

What kind of vine is Jesus?

Notice the qualifier *true* John adds at the beginning of the expression. In the Greek it is the point of emphasis in what is being revealed. Many human activities produce good things in life and achieve genuine highpoints for us but they do not add to what makes a person fully human and fully alive. Only Jesus can add that key element to who we are and to what we do and it is this *Jesus-abiding-within* that richly flavours everything else we undertake in life. Only with Christ in our lives can we know what it means to be fully human and fully alive.

God pursues us to bring us home

He created us, calls us and sends us. In Jesus he leads us, guides us, empowers us and heals us. This is no distant God, a deity who created all things and then retreated into the heavens leaving creation to its own devices. In our Gospel he is presented as our *Vine-keeper*. He *tends* us. John refers to the *pruning* by the Vine-keeper with a verb that means *to clean*. It is a sign of the value each *branch* has in the eyes of the Father. *Disease* (sin, apostasy, laziness, unfaithfulness, etc) is not necessarily the end of the branch. It is not cut off until rehabilitation, healing is finished. When there is *pruning*, it is all about strengthening the branch - not punishment. Pruning is about allowing the branch to draw in more nourishment and food (grace) from the vine (Jesus). The cleansing/pruning of the vine described here by Jesus is an ongoing activity. All need it for the whole of life. We are reminded by John of the way God goes onto the front foot and pursues us, engages with us in order that we be open to the manifold gifts that are the inheritance for those who *abide in Christ*.

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leading.

Whatever the question Jesus is the answer

There is something intrinsically beautiful about the way John employs this metaphor. The vine belongs to the Father and it is “planted” in order that the people may have joy. This is a vine and its purpose is the production of wine that the people may rejoice. It is not the essentials of life being discussed here (as when Jesus is talking about himself in terms of bread and water). The Father seeks to provide *wine* for the world! So important are men and women in the divine plan; so vital is the gift of joy and of being able to rejoice in their lives on earth, the Father sends his only Son. Not only does God plant the vine. God tends the vine, pruning it and caring for it, so that its branches produce the maximum fruit possible.

Note the warning !!!

But there is also an alternative to *rejoicing* – it is being *pruned*, cut off from the vine and thrown away into the fire. This is very harsh language but branches on the vine were never there for a decorative function. They were there for the provision of fruit. If disciples “dry up”, become infected by “disease” or fail to remain connected to the vine and the nutrients it offers, they will be cast aside. More correctly, they will cast themselves away from the vine. It is tough language but discipleship brings with it serious responsibilities.

Disciples have a role to play

Jesus puts a stress on the absolute necessity of *abiding in me*. We can observe as our world struggles with the consequences of its own selfishness and egotistical ways. It will continue seek to tear itself apart because people are not being nourished by the *fruits* that are made available in Jesus the Christ. This explains why disciples need to be men and women *doing the works* of Jesus; keeping his commandments, imitating his own witness to his Father’s love and obeying the teachings of their Lord. Discipleship does not allow for passive living in the world, living the Gospel as a kind of private spiritual pursuit. It is a calling to be engaged with the world’s needs.

what does all of this mean for disciples today?

The major call from this reading is the divine expectation that as disciples we are *as-Christ* to the world. *Abiding in Christ* is about projecting Christ to others, about allowing the *Christ-*

What God wants is faithfulness

What this metaphor highlights is the way all of this *fruitfulness* in discipleship comes about only – ***only*** in accordance with the degree of intimacy between Christ (the vine) and disciples (branches). Separated from Jesus there is no true heavenly *joy* and we witness that reality when our world struggles to find and maintain peace, unity and joy. One of the things John stresses throughout his Gospel is how this *abiding in Christ* is not guaranteed simply because a person is baptized. The level of this abiding depends on lived faithfulness to *the words (that is the teachings and witness) of Jesus*.

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in-me to enrich, guide and transform all we do and say as men and women in the world. How do we imitate Christ? Well, the key to that is reading and meditating on his Word as made known to us through the Scriptures. Live the Gospel and we imitate Christ.

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