

**Abide in Me**  
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**1 John 4:7-21**

<sup>7</sup>Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

<sup>13</sup>By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup>And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup>God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>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. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

**John 15:1-8**

<sup>1</sup>"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup>He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Returning to you this week after study leave I want to first thank this church, and this denomination, for the commitment to and promise of continuing education. I gained so much from last week and I hope to give back just as much to you. For those who don't know, I spent the week studying the Taizé style of worship. I read a number of great books on the topic and attended even more services in the style of Taizé. I'd like to share with you an introduction.

Before my week of study leave, I had thought that Taizé was mainly about the trademark songs which sound like chants. I knew that I had seen Taizé services sponsored by a combination of churches and I thought that was because it wouldn't draw a full congregation's worth of people so they combined their efforts. Not so. Taizé is many things. It is a village in the Burgundy region of France. It is the

place where a Swiss man named Roger bought a house where he could form an intentional community of men with a passion for reconciliation among the Christian faiths, centered on the idea that, above all, we, as followers of Christ, are called to love. Roger became Brother Roger and the prior of the community and, as it began to grow, they sought out a bigger place to worship. They received permission to use an unused Catholic church in the village and others began worshipping with them.

Eventually, they could not accommodate the number of visitors to their worship space and bought land that they might build a bigger church. This they did and people did come, especially young adults, from countries all over western Europe. Although it was never their intention, they outgrew this church space. Their main goal remained being an intentional community working toward reconciliation and, initially, Brother Roger, did not want the crowds which came and did not see how they fit the goal. Eventually he understood that God was asking more of him. He could and should still be part of the intentional community but there was a calling to include these people, these young adults, in the life of the community.

After knocking down the back wall of the church and erecting a striped circus tent to fit the additional visitors, the brothers began to realize that the French liturgy with the French hymns they were singing were not helping bring together these people who had already come together physically from all these countries. And, once the Berlin Wall fell, they found there were even more people coming, with visitors flooding in from eastern Europe. So they adapted their liturgy, simplifying it to its essence, and they asked a friend to come up with the songs which are familiar in Taizé worship today. These songs are in many languages, including traditional Latin; they are simple and they are repeated so that all might pick up on them and so that all might fall into prayer while singing them. Initially the repetition serves to allow people to learn the songs; after a time the repetition can seem a bit boring but, once a person can get past the desire for something new to begin, one is able to fall into a prayerful state wherein the song becomes the connection to God.

All who visit Taizé are assigned a work duty, are expected to worship with the community three times a day, and are part of daily Bible study. And people willingly do this for a week at a time. Some do it so frequently that they feel compelled to consider joining the brotherhood and then they spend a longer amount of time working, welcoming, worshipping, and studying. And there are some who, after this extended stay, still feel called to become a brother of the community. Today there are over one hundred men who have committed themselves to the work of reconciliation, some who live in Taizé and some who make their homes in impoverished lands to do their work there.

Thus Taizé is the songs, the community, *and* the work of reconciliation. I give you all this background because, out of my learning about it, I came to some questions, and even some answers.

Reconciliation, like that which the community seeks, and forgiveness go hand-in-hand and so I began to think about Jesus' forgiveness of us. Why does it matter that Jesus has forgiven us? Being forgiven doesn't change the act for which we need forgiving. In fact that act of forgiving and the act which needs forgiveness are only barely connected by a fine thread. It does not matter what we have done or not done, nor how great or how small, only that forgiveness is needed, and *that* is the connection. Out of our need for forgiveness, Jesus forgives. He doesn't do it to fix anything or to undo anything. Forgiveness is an act of love. Forgiveness is an act of love toward God's creation.

And just as to love others needs me to love myself, to forgive others requires forgiving myself. Which leads me toward another question. Why should I forgive myself? Besides the obvious reason that it frees me to forgive others, particularly for the same things which I won't let go of in myself, I wasn't sure this of answer. I *could*, however, come up with very good reasons why, while it's fine and dandy that Christ has forgiven me, I should hold onto what I hold onto. The biggest of these is fear.

I grew up a goody two-shoes but that doesn't mean I never went astray. I said mean things and I did mean things and, more than anything, I thought mean things. And the things I didn't do - that is a long list. You may say I hadn't yet matured in faith, you may say I hadn't grown up yet and, while these may be true, I look back on the choices I have made, when I was younger and even yesterday, which do not reflect the fact that I believe in Christ and seek to follow him and I have regret. And with that regret comes fear, fear that if I forgive myself for those things which I realize I did or did not do, that I might repeat them. And, should I come to a point when I forgive myself, there will still be some people to whom I will have a hard time giving forgiveness. For them, I have justifications - there are people whom I am confident are wrong and there are people who have wronged me. For them, it is with these reasons that I justify withholding my forgiveness.

First John is before me: "Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another" and "if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us" and "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." These words are not a punishment or a pronouncement of judgment, just the stating of a fact. We cannot abide in God if we do not allow God to abide in us.

God's love and God's forgiveness are elegantly simple. "There is no fear in love" nor is there justification or even thought about the outcome or possible reward. As Claudia Highbaugh has put it, "The love that abides in God, as expressed when people love one another, is not a love that contemplates

either purpose or result.”<sup>1</sup> And, if Jesus abides in us and us in him as we read in John, Nancy R. Blakely says, “When we remain that close to Jesus, we attuned to him and he to us, the remarkable result is that what we want will be what God wants, and it will surely come to pass.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, if we follow Jesus’ words which say, “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” We easily think that, if we are followers, this should mean we should get what we want. Not so fast. If what we want comes from our selfish wants, not likely. If, however, we want what God wants, we think like God thinks, we love like God loves and forgive like God forgives, then we are fulfilling God’s will and it will surely come to pass.

If we withhold the same forgiveness that Jesus so freely gives, whether to ourselves or to others, we simply cannot abide in God. Which brings me to an answer to my question of “Why should I forgive myself?” Because forgiveness is an act of love toward God’s creation and that is what God desires, no excuses or explanations or fears or justifications. The commands to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves are not either/or. They must work together for God to abide in us. The surest way to avoid the regrets of the things we have done and the things we have left undone is to act in love. Then, all will flow from God, all will reflect the Jesus in whom we believe and whom we follow. Paul tells it to us clearly in 1 Corinthians 13: if I do not have love, I am nothing. God abiding in us is not love as noun; God’s act of abiding in us is love the verb, which means action on our part. It won’t be perfect because we’re not perfect; we’ll still have regrets but, “if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.” If we wish to abide in Christ as Christ seeks to abide in us, then we must seek to love and forgive as best as we can, without fear or justification, but with trust that God will make our love and our forgiveness perfect to God’s understanding of perfection. So may it be with you and with me.

Let us pray: Abide in us, O God. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 6*, p. 468.

<sup>2</sup> *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 6*, p. 474.