

Abide

6 5 18

God our redeemer,
you have delivered us from the powers of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:
grant, that by his death he has recalled us to life
so by his continual presence with us he may raise us to eternal joy.

Our text may be found in today's gospel – John chapter 15, the end of verse 9:

‘ . . . abide in my love.’

Two weeks ago, we touched on the idea of God's love for us expressed in the image of the 'good shepherd'. Last week, we looked at another of the great I am statements in John's gospel – 'I am the true vine'. This week, we see a development of the one and a mirror image of the other. We see how to abide in the love of God is to be part of that true vine and by expressing his love for us by obeying his commandment to love one another, we are reflecting God's love for us and our love of him by loving other folk as we love ourselves.

I guess if I were to ask you what the most often repeated message in my Sunday sermons, then the answer would be love – agape – God's love for us which we mirror by loving him and loving our neighbours even as we love ourselves. And today's passage, that follows on from last week's wonderful picture of Jesus as the true vine, tells us how we may be empowered to express that love.

Now you know as well as I do that it is not always easy to express love for others.

One reason may be we don't love ourselves. When we look in the mirror, are we ill-at-ease with whom we see ourselves to be ? If we are, I'm not sure why. Perhaps we fall short of the standards we set ourselves. Perhaps we fail to meet the goals that we or our parents have set for ourselves. Perhaps we see ourselves through the jaundiced eyes of those who dislike us. I'm not sure why but I am sure that if we fail to love ourselves, then it is very likely we won't, in general, like other people either.

One reason may be that other people are so very different from us. Appearance, age, gender, class, religion or race - all may be reasons that we don't like someone, fail to get on with them, fail to accept them for who and what they are. The way they treat us and what we hold dear may well prevent us from trying to express our love for them. As ever, there is choice and we can only offer love to others which they are free to accept or reject. Do we continue to try to give what is precious to those who invariably fail to value our gift to them ?

But the secret of being able to love with an open heart and a generous spirit is the fact of being connected with the source of that love - God the Father, embodied in God the Son, inspired, informed and enthused by God the Holy Spirit. And that is what the image 'abide in my love' is urging us to do. Tom Wright, in his recent translation of the New Testament, uses the word 'remain' instead of 'abide'. The word in Greek John uses is μένω (meno) which literally means to remain or

continue which is exactly how the King James Bible translated the word in today's text.

So there we have the key to be able to love: we need to remain connected with God's love for us, to continue to be in touch with God who loves us. Our eyes need to be open to see; our ears ready to listen; our mind alert, awake, aware, attentive to God speaking to us through his holy scriptures, in what is going on around us and through, dare I say, what other people have to say to us.

So let me end by reflecting that the love of God expressed in the image of the good shepherd should be mirrored by us in loving other people as we love ourselves. And that this is possible because we remain connected to God's love for us by being part of the true vine, by being branches of the true vine through which God's love may flow and be expressed.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

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