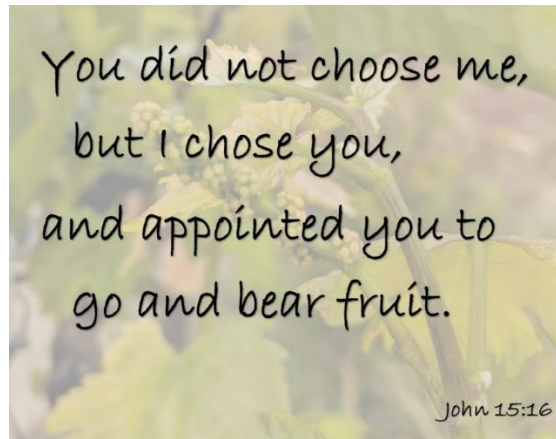


Sermon – May 5, 2024
“I Chose You”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: John 15:9-17

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come, visit, fill, and anoint the sharing of these words. Make them a blessing for your people that leads them to life eternal and fruitful labor as we abide in you on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! I pray that the joy of Easter will grow in our hearts each day as we awake ready to serve our risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Our Easter morning joy seems distant now, but the gift of a risen Lord, freedom from sin and death, is not a gift that brings joy that fades with time or is enjoyed for a moment and passes. Resurrection is a gift that rises up in our hearts, growing each day as we grow into the image of Christ. Let us recall always that we are Easter people and that Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Let me share some background as context for this morning's reading. Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples. They are enjoying a time of table fellowship and Jesus is sharing what will be his final teaching with his disciples. The teaching Jesus shares at the table is called the final discourse. Earlier in the discourse, Jesus has told his disciples that he is the true vine. They are to abide in him and be branches that produce fruit. One of the challenges for us found in Jesus' upper room discourse is to know what Jesus means when he teaches that his disciples are to abide in him and produce fruit. Let's look at this morning's text and see if we can grow in our understanding of abiding and producing fruit so that we might be those who are abiding in

Jesus and are producing abundant fruit. As we encounter Jesus' words, we may begin to realize that we are not abiding and producing fruit and may need to ask Holy Spirit to guide us so that we become fruit-producing followers of Jesus.

In today's scripture reading, Jesus again tells his followers to abide in his love, repeating the same command given earlier in the discourse. The doubling of the command tells us that Jesus is emphasizing his teaching on abiding in him. When I begin to look at the idea of abiding in Jesus and keeping his commandments, I immediately think about keeping the Ten Commandments and all of the other commandments found in the Law, wondering if that is how we are to abide in Jesus. The best answer I can give related to the keeping of all of the Old Testament commandments is they are not in sight in our reading so they are not the immediate focus of Jesus' teaching. But don't lose sight of them just yet as our understanding of Jesus' commandments will end up with a connection to what we know as the Law or Torah. Keeping Jesus' commandments is abiding in his love. The first commandment Jesus gives is found in the text read this morning. We are to love others as Jesus loves us and the greatest example of love we know of is to lay down one's life for one's friends. Jesus has gone to the cross and surrendered his life for us. We are to be those who love Jesus by loving others. The Church is the body of Christ and as such, we are to be those who are loving each other. The Church includes those with whom we worship within our local church and those who are part of the body of Christ who worship in other denominations.

There is a saying that applies well to abiding in Jesus: "Knowing requires doing." Since we know we are to abide in Jesus's commandments and one of them is to love one another, we are to be those abiding in Jesus by loving others. Look around our church and remember we are commanded to love each other, and as we love each other we are abiding in Jesus.

Now if we look further in this morning's text to the last part of verse 16, we will find another of Jesus' commandments. He appointed us to go and bear fruit. The word "go" implies we are not only to love those with whom we worship but are to go, as sent people, out into the world and love people who often are not very loveable. With the addition of this commandment, we have two jobs. The first is to love those who are currently part of the body of Christ, the Church universal, and the second is to love those who are outside of that body, those in the world who do not know Jesus' love. That leaves us as those seeking to abide in Jesus needing to love everyone. Going and bearing fruit implies that new lives are being brought, through Jesus' love

that is taken to the world by us in the power of Holy Spirit, into the kingdom of God. When we obey Jesus by loving others and going with him into his mission so that we might bear fruit, we are those who are abiding in Jesus. The love in us drives out sin, and holiness fills the void. The love in us brings us to obedience to Jesus' commandments. We are keeping the Law by loving others. Remember Jesus loved his enemies. Those in the world who do not know Jesus are separated from God. They are enemies of God and we are to love them so that we might bear fruit. We are to love those who are separated from God as Jesus loved us while we were yet sinners. As followers of Jesus, as those who are seeking to abide in Jesus, we are to be branches connected to the true vine. We are to love others.

Jesus tells us we did not choose him, but he chose us. While we were still sinners, Jesus died for us so that we might have grace extended to us and be reconciled through his blood to God. Jesus' love extends not to only a few people but is available to all people who repent of their sin and turn to him. As people come to believe in Jesus and are filled with Holy Spirit, they are to abide in Jesus, and as they abide in Jesus, they are to love one another and go and bear fruit. We abide in Jesus by loving each other. At some point, we have to ask ourselves, "How do we love one another?" and "How do we love like Jesus loves us?" Let me point us to the words from Isaiah that Jesus read when he started his mission. These are words we use in some form each week as our benediction. He read, "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor."ⁱ Jesus shows us what love looks like primarily by going to the cross and dying for our sins, but as he carries out his mission to all people, he does other loving things. We are to continue Jesus' mission by loving one another. We should be out in the world continuing Jesus' mission by doing the things Jesus did while he was on earth. We should be those who are filled with Holy Spirit and in the guidance of Holy Spirit are bringing the Good News of Jesus to people who have not heard. We are to care for the brokenhearted. Our voices should give praise to Jesus as we proclaim release from sin to those who are captive to sin and its consequence, death. We are to teach those imprisoned in their sin in the world that there is freedom in Jesus Christ, so that they also might experience the love of Jesus and come to believe in him. And, as has been said now by many people, "When all else fails, we are to use words to proclaim to others that the year of our Lord's favor is here." Jesus chose us to continue his

mission by abiding in him, seen as us loving one another. Not everyone in the world has experienced the love of Jesus. As I watched the protests on our university campuses grow this past week, I could not help but wonder if those with such hate and confusion had ever experienced the love of Jesus. They will not find Jesus' love in their textbooks as Jesus has been removed from them. They will not find Jesus in the media because he has been remade into someone Jesus is not. They will only find Jesus if someone abiding in him goes to them and loves them as Jesus loves. They can only become fruit for the kingdom of God if someone will take Jesus' love to them and walk with them until they experience the love of Jesus for themselves.

At some point as we consider taking Jesus' love to the world, we have to ask ourselves, "How do we love those who do not know Jesus' love and have never experienced his love?" and "How can we be love to those who desperately need love?" and "How do we lay down our lives for our friends?" These are difficult questions especially when we are facing angry crowds who have had their hearts filled with a view of Jesus and his followers that is inconsistent with the Jesus of the Bible. We may not be called to go to a university campus and love a student, but we are to be those who start sharing Jesus' love by praying for those we will never meet but we see through the media. Pray that in the midst of the protesters' hate and anger the light of Jesus will shine into their hearts. Pray that they will experience Jesus' love. And boldly pray that we be given an opportunity every day to abide in Jesus by sharing the love he has for us with everyone we do meet. Ask Holy Spirit to lead us to those who have not experienced Jesus' love and through our loving witness, to love those whose need for the love of Jesus is so great. Let me also encourage us to spend time in the scriptures reading the examples of how Jesus showed love to those he met, and then prepare our hearts to share those examples in word and deeds with someone to whom Holy Spirit has led us to share the love we have from Jesus. Take a risk when we see a need in someone's life and offer to pray for them. They can tell us no, but they may say yes. And when they do accept our offer, we need to be ready to tell them who Jesus is and what he has done for us as we pray for them. Sometimes we will miss the guidance of Holy Spirit and get the guidance wrong, but take the risk and seek to love one another and when we fail, ask Jesus for forgiveness and to lead us forward into the world with his love. We are to be those who are abiding in Jesus, and that means we are not people who only come and sit in a pew and worship Jesus with others. We are those sent by Jesus who are to abide in him by going where he

leads us and loving those we are led to as Jesus has loved us. The world does not tell us how to love. Jesus gives us the example of how to love seen in the cross and in the scriptures. Yes, we may face rejection when we seek to love, but we are to be out loving others.

Love starts in our hearts as Jesus comes and fills us with his love. As we begin to grasp what Jesus has done for us, our hearts will be strangely warmed and we will be sent out to take the love of Jesus to others. It begins when we experience Jesus' love and we are changed by that love. When we are changed by Jesus' love, we start with our homes and let the love of Jesus change our homes into places where Jesus' love is extended to all who are there and who come to visit. As our homes become places filled with Jesus' love, we move next to our church family and love each other. Look for ways to spread the love of Jesus to each other. Share with each other what we are learning as we look at Jesus' example of love that we find in scripture and seek to share his love with others in the same way. Then we move out into the community and share the love of Jesus there as well. Be open to sharing Jesus with everyone we meet. Strive to be those who are abiding in Jesus as we go about living in our community. Love transforms us, and as we are transformed, the world is transformed into the kingdom of God. Abide in Jesus by loving others. Look to the word of God and when we find examples of Jesus' love there, reflect on them, learn from them, and be open to letting Holy Spirit lead us to love others in the truth of Jesus' love.

Communion is a reminder of Jesus' love. It is a time when we recall his broken body in the breaking of the bread and his shed blood through the sharing of a cup of the juice of the vine. Our time together in fellowship at his table with each other is a time of table fellowship with our Lord, a time of abiding together around his table. It is a time when we experience Jesus' presence as we commune with him and each other. It is a time to remember the grace he has extended to us through his love on the cross. Prepare our hearts to abide in Jesus. Come to his table and meet him here and then go and begin to bear the fruit of Jesus' love among each other and those we meet in the world.

Pray with me: Jesus, teach us to abide in you. Jesus, come and make our joy complete. Guide us each day to love one another as you love us and to grow in our understanding and sharing of your love. Lord, we thank you for choosing to love us and sending us to love others. Jesus, send Holy Spirit to change us and guide us into new expressions of love for each other

and for those we are sent to in our community and throughout the world. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to bring good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Go forth into Jesus' mission.

¹ Bibles, Harper . NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha (p. 1721). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.