

## ABIDING IN CHRIST

John 15:1-17

May 31, 2026

There are some forms of exhaustion that sleep just does not fix. Most of us know the feeling. You can get through the week, the day, maybe even get through everything on your calendar...and still feel exhausted somewhere deeper down.

I'd guess that a lot of us wake up already feeling behind. Before our feet even hit the floor we've checked emails, texts, headlines, calendars, notifications... And from the very beginning of the day there's this quiet feeling humming underneath everything saying: "I need to keep up."

And I think part of that exhaustion comes from constantly feeling like we have to hold our lives together. Holding together our schedules, our relationships, futures, identities, sometimes even our faith. And after a while, even faith can start to feel like just another thing to keep up with. And so when we hear a passage like this one where Jesus says: "abide in me..." I think a lot of us can hear *pressure* instead of *invitation*.

Because we all have some picture in our heads of what a 'healthy branch' in Christ is *supposed* to look like—right?! Healthy branches—they pray enough, they're peaceful, always smiling, they never struggle, never doubt. And then we hear the line about: "any branch that does not bear fruit..." and immediately the self-assessment begins again: Am I doing enough? Am I connected enough? Am I spiritually healthy enough? And, since we're all human beings, you can probably think of at least five things from the last half hour that now make you wonder if the pruning shears are *already* headed your direction...

We've become so used to interpreting life through the lens of *performance* that we can even turn something as

freeing as the gospel into performance. But Jesus is not describing an audition for belonging. He's describing where our lives, our very being, comes *from*. "I am the vine, you are the branches...abide in me as I abide in you..." And the order of these words matters a lot. Because Jesus doesn't simply say: "abide in me" he says: "abide in me **as I abide in you**." a subtle shift that changes everything. Because before we ever hold onto Christ, Christ is already holding onto us. Later in this same conversation, Jesus says: "you did not choose me, but I chose you."

Maybe that's what makes abiding possible in the first place. Before we ever reached toward God, God had already reached toward us in love. "I am the vine and you are the branches." Now these branches are not self-sustaining. They receive life...they depend on the vine for life. And then Jesus says: "Apart from me, you can do *nothing*."

We may hear that as a threat. As a judgement statement on our ability. But honestly, I wonder if it's actually a statement of relief. Maybe Jesus is just naming the reality. The reality that branches were never meant to survive disconnected from the vine. Perhaps part of the reason we're exhausted is because we keep trying to live like we can sustain ourselves apart from God. Like everything depends on us. Like we have to manufacture even life itself on our own.

I remember once as a kid picking apples at an orchard in Michigan. Among the towering branches, I picked a giant Honeycrisp and tucked it into the crook of the tree so I could grab it later. But I forgot it. A few days later it had already started decaying while the other apples beside it kept ripening. It still looked alive for a little while...but it wasn't receiving life anymore.

One of the things I love about this Scripture is that Jesus uses this deeply organic image. A vine. Branches. Fruit. Growth. It's not machinery or productivity metrics, just organic life. And there's a huge difference between organic growth and mechanical pressure. Fruit doesn't get taped onto a branch or nestled back into the tree. It grows because life is flowing through it. And that's exactly why Jesus keeps returning to this word: abide. Eugene Peterson translates this abiding as: "live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you." Live in me. Make your home in me. This is not just advice for self-improvement. Christ is alive and present even now, calling you to Himself with the desire that you might make your home in him. Jesus is the vine, the heart's true home. We are the branches, abiding not as isolated individuals but as a people held together in the love of God. All the while the Spirit allows us to live connected to the vine, tended to by the gardener. "Make your home in me just as I do in you"...home.

Home is not a place of performance, it's a place of belonging. I believe that one of the deep struggles we face in this instant age is the reality of spiritual homelessness. We're connected to everything all the time, yet somehow seemingly more disconnected from ourselves, from each other, and from God. We know how to consume, we know how to scroll, we know how to stay busy. We have forgotten how to remain. How to dwell. How to abide. When we sit still, we reach for our phones. Silence has started to feel uncomfortable. We've forgotten how to stay somewhere long enough to be known. But every once in a while we encounter communities that remind us what abiding actually feels like.

Second Church, thank you for loving and knowing me these past two years as we've sought to abide in Christ together. There have been so many meaningful moments, and some of my absolute favorites have been our monthly gatherings of The Belonging. We gather to eat, to share news, to laugh, and simply to be together. And what has always struck me is how little pretending there is in that room. Nobody has to prove themselves. Nobody has to perform spiritually

or present success or have it all together. People show up as they are and somehow, in that space, belonging comes before achievement.

And the longer I've reflected on that, the more I've wondered if that's part of what Jesus means when he says: "Make your home in me." Because I think we are all far more exhausted from performing than we realize. And maybe abiding begins when we finally stop trying to earn a place in the vine and simply receive the life already being given to us. "I am the vine, you are the branches...Make your home in me just as I do in you."

And then Jesus starts talking about pruning. Which, if we're honest, is probably the part of this passage most of us would prefer to avoid. Because pruning sounds painful. And sometimes it is. But pruning is not punishment. It's what a gardener does when they love the plant enough to not leave it tangled in on itself.

N.T. Wright talks about learning to prune roses as a kid. He says that left alone, rose bushes start growing inward on themselves. They get tangled. They block their own light. They waste energy on growth that never really flourishes. The same goes with vines. So the gardener cuts away what keeps the plant from bearing the kind of fruit that reflects the life of Christ: love, mercy, joy, patience, compassion. Not to harm it. But to help it grow toward the light. And over time, God does work on us. Sometimes through conviction. Sometimes through surrender. Sometimes even through seasons we never would have chosen for ourselves. Even in those moments, God can loosen the grip of our fears, our vain ambitions, our distractions, our need for control.

But still...pruning hurts, disappointment hurts. And in those moments it can become very hard to trust the gardener. One theologian wrote: "A skilled gardener does not cut off anything that was not a loss to keep and a gain to lose."

I've thought a lot about that line in preparation for today. Because I think that one of the hardest parts of faith is *believing* that God is more committed to our flourishing than we are. But that still leaves a question: How do

we know we can trust the gardener? How do we know that the One doing the pruning is acting in love and not indifference? The answer is Jesus.

This becomes good news when we remember who Jesus is. Because Jesus is not distant from suffering. Christ himself was cut off. Isaiah 53 says that "he was cut off from the land of the living." The true vine entered death itself. So that we might be grafted into life. And that means even in seasons where life feels painful or confusing or stripped back...the invitation remains: "abide in me as I abide in you"

So where does all of this abiding and pruning lead? Jesus says: "abide in my love" Love. That's the goal. Not performance. Not being impressive. Not having control. But, Love. Lives shaped by love. The deepest sign that we have made our home in Christ is not that we become more impressive people. It is that we become more loving people. People rooted deeply enough in Christ's love that grace begins to spill outward into patience and mercy and compassion and joy.

Jesus says "I have said these things so that my joy may be in you." Joy. Not pressure. Not exhaustion. Joy. And maybe that's the deepest truth in this whole passage: the vine is what sustains us in joy. Not ourselves. It's not about our ability to hold ourselves together. But Christ. The true vine. Or as Paul puts it: "Christ himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Which means the invitation of this passage is not to hold yourself together, but to remain connected to the One who already does.

Jesus says: "apart from me, you can do nothing." and *in the very same breath*: "Abide in me as I abide in you." Not threat and demand. Truth and invitation. There's a quote from C.S. Lewis where he writes about how we often underestimate what God is doing in our lives. He writes:

*"Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on... But presently He starts knocking the house about*

*in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of...You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself." (Mere Christianity, 1952)*

Maybe that's what abiding is. Not another burden to carry. Not another thing to achieve, but making a home in Christ and discovering that Christ has already made his home in you.

"How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts."  
"I am the vine you are the branches. Abide in me as I abide in you."

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.