

## **“Abiding in Your Abode”**

John 15:1-15

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### **Prayer**

Lord God, with the trust we have, we say that we want to trust some more. Trust is even a fruit of your Spirit. So, Lord God, would you come and grow that fruit in our lives? Would you nurture us, would you grow us into trust-ers? And I will trust because you are doing it, and you don't fail. In Jesus' name we pray, Lord God, amen.

[Movie clip from *A Walk in the Clouds*: People working together in a vineyard picking grapes and then crushing grapes with their feet while dancing in the vat.]

### **Sermon**

That's from the movie *A Walk in the Clouds*. I thought it just might help you get into a vineyard sort of mood. A vineyard is a place of great beauty, growth, life, and joy. It produces fruit which is crushed in giant vats and turned into wine. The Bible is full of stories about vineyards and wine. As Jesus hangs on the cross in John 19:28, right before He says, “It is finished,” Jesus says, “I thirst.” And they give Him something to drink from a sponge attached to a stick. It was sour wine or vinegar. Bad wine. That's hugely significant, for in numerous places in Scripture, Israel is referred to as “the Lord's vineyard.”

- Isaiah 5:1: “Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard.” But the song reveals that Israel—that vineyard—produces *be-oo-sheem* (from *be-osh* for stink), literally translated “stink berries.”
- In Hosea 10:1, God says, “Israel is a luxuriant vine [also translated empty vine], which yields fruit for itself.” A luxuriant, empty vine that yields fruit for itself. That doesn't make much sense, unless you've grown grapes. I have two grape vines on the side of the house. If I leave them to themselves, they grow immense and luxuriant but produce very little and very poor fruit. However, when I prune them, just cut away bushels of branches, I get loads of fruit.
- In Isaiah 6, right after Isaiah describes Israel as a vineyard, Isaiah prophesies that Israel will be destroyed and burned right down to its stump. And then Isaiah says, “The holy seed is its stump.” The holy seed is the root of David, who is Jesus. John has just quoted Isaiah 6 rather extensively, and now in our text Jesus has just shared His last meal with the disciples, where He took a cup of wine and said, “This is my blood.” At the end of chapter 14, He says, “Rise, let us go from here.” As they walked to Gethsemane, they likely passed through ancient vineyards. In the morning, Israel would deliver Jesus up to crucifixion. That's some strange and sour fruit.

Well, in that place, at that time, Jesus says, “I am...”—*ego eimie*. It's the name of God.

John 15:1-11:

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes [kathairo], that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean [pruned, katharos, the noun form of kathairo, the sources of our English word “catharsis”] because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine,*

*neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is [was] thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me [Wow! Jesus is from the kolpos, the bosom of the Father or lap of the Father], so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*

"I am the true vine," and He is the root of David, the holy seed, the fruit: the root and fruit. "I am the vine."

What is a vine?

Well, it's this mysterious thing called life that mixes dirt with light and grows. In the beginning, God, who is light, took dirt and breathed His breath of life, and Adam became a living *nephesh*—a soul. "I am the vine, you are the branches," said Jesus, the *Eschatos* Adam.

Branches are literally in the vine. I mean, they are part of the vine. When I prune my grape vines, I don't know where the vine stops and the branches begin. Paul wrote that we are the body of Christ and that "it is no longer I who live but Christ in me." Jesus is the vine, and certainly He is the life in every branch. The branches abide in the vine. We abide in our abode.

In the last chapter, Jesus talked about our abode. We talked about how the process of abiding creates an abode. When I finally and completely come to abide in my abode, I'm home. No one ever says, "What's the purpose of being home? What do you intend to produce by being at home?" Home isn't a means to an end. It *is* the end. So I don't have a purpose-driven home. My purpose is to drive home.

Home is...     where I rest  
                  where I unwind  
                  where I let down  
                  where I hang out and waste time  
                  where I stop producing

Yet, ironically, Jesus says that *that* place, where I stop producing, will produce fruit...when that place is Him.

Jesus says, "Abide in me and I in you. Abide in my love. Make yourself at home in me and my love." The people I'm at home with are my family. And when my kids were little, they were most at home on my lap. They'd just crawl up there and put their heads on my chest. Just sit there. Sometimes they'd ask me to tell them a story. Sometimes they'd just talk and talk and talk...especially Elizabeth.



Elizabeth had an opinion about everything, and it usually made little sense. Most people would see it as a complete waste of my time, but I'd rather listen to Elizabeth babble than listen to lectures from world-renowned intellectuals. Actually, it really didn't matter what she did as long as she was there on my lap, head against my chest.

One night I came home late from work, around 11:00 p.m. I always came through the back gate and into the back yard. This night, I tripped over something and realized it was my favorite, blue shirt, the one I wore all the time. When I got inside, I said, "Hey, Honey, what's my shirt doing in the back yard by the gate?" She said, "Oh, Peter, Elizabeth missed you so much today. She went to the dirty clothes basket and found your old, smelly, blue shirt and took it out to the back gate." (Elizabeth was two at the time.) Susan said:

Peter, she just sat out there with your shirt. She'd get up and look through the cracks and then lie on the grass, staring at the sky, holding your shirt. Around dinnertime, I said, "Honey, why don't you come in for supper?" Elizabeth said, "No. I wait for Daddy." Finally I took some snacks out to her on the lawn. She stayed there for three or four hours until it got dark and I made her come in.

Elizabeth loved to abide in her abode, which was my lap. And I loved to abide in my abode, which was Elizabeth. Jesus said, "Abide in my love." You can't produce His love or earn His love. You can only make your home in His love. His love is unconditional, and it's already there and always there. You can't produce it, but it will produce things in you and through you. Abide in it, and you will be fruit.

When Elizabeth was little, she used to write sermons for me because she saw that I found it difficult. One morning I asked the kids what they wanted to be when they grew up, and Elizabeth said, "I want to be a paleontologist." (I had told her that that was what I studied in college.) She said, "I want to be a paleontologist," paused for a moment, and said, "Daddy, what's a paleontologist?"

She would follow me, even when I told her not to. It actually resulted in some serious injuries. She still has a scar on her forehead from following me up a pile of mine tailings and getting a rock to the head. She'd follow me even when it hurt. In 1992, I went on a hot salsa kick. At three years old, she'd stand at the coffee table eating hot salsa with me, tears streaming down her cheeks. And I'd say, "Honey, you don't have to eat this," and she'd say, "But, Daddy, I love salsa. We love salsa."

She produced fruit,  
And I never told her she had to do it.  
It was her joy;  
Life in my image.

In Galatians 6, St. Paul lists fruit of the Spirit as opposed to works of the flesh. Stuff from the flesh is work; stuff from the Spirit is fruit. A branch doesn't try to produce fruit; it just abides, and fruit happens. Fruit really isn't about the self, so you can't produce it with self, with worrying about the self, trying to produce more self. You know, a branch in a vine is about itself, and growth is just more self. But fruit is given away. It's life given away. It's a seed for another.

One day I took Elizabeth to the doctor for her check up. This lady doctor looked at Elizabeth and asked, "Elizabeth, tell me what you like about yourself." Immediately Elizabeth's eyes lit up, she looked at me, smiled, swung her feet under the table, and said, "I like...being with my daddy." And immediately the doctor said, "No..." ( I could tell that came from some old and painful wound.) "No...I mean what do you like about Elizabeth?" Elizabeth looked confused, like, "Didn't I just tell you?" The doctor continued, "You know, like you can run fast or sing." And Elizabeth said, "Oh, I like that I can run fast." My heart sank, for that's not who Elizabeth is, and it won't end in joy. It ends in herself—her independent, autonomous, lonely self. And one day her legs will fail. But love won't fail. Even if I fail, love won't fail. God is love, and love will remain.

A Christian is someone who likes being with their Daddy. They lose themselves in Him and find themselves in Him. They themselves become fruit from that abiding. So where there was a container of arrogance and self there is now a vessel of grace (the new wine). Jesus said, "Abide in me and bear much fruit. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love." And if you abide in His love, you *are* keeping His commandments, aren't you? That is His commandment.

Do you know why I hate it when my kids break my commandments? It's really not about the particulars of the commandment. (We can repaint the walls, get the car fixed, and even bail them out of jail.) It's not the commandments themselves but that choosing to break them is choosing to hide...which is choosing to no longer abide in me.

So if you're breaking commandments  
and producing stink berries,  
you can't fix it by trying;  
the problem is that you hide and no longer abide.

One day when Elizabeth was about six, she was being particularly ornery, and *be-oo-sheem* (stink berries) lay strewn across the ground. We took the kids out to dinner that night, and in

the van on the way to the restaurant Elizabeth was picking fights, calling names, and disobeying my every command. When we got to the restaurant, I sent everyone inside except Elizabeth. I sat her in the front seat of the van, and with my word I issued my judgment and began to prune. “Elizabeth, what has gotten into you? You’re usually nice, but you’ve just gotten nasty and mean. What’s gotten into you?” I didn’t expect an answer, but she replied, “I know, but I’m not telling you.” I prodded and poked, and then I made her come sit on my lap. It burned her pride until she finally just cracked. Through her sobs, she said, “Do you remember when you came to my kindergarten class? Do you remember Kelly?” I did. She was a little girl that just glommed onto me. Elizabeth cried, “Well, Kelly said that you said when you came to my class...she said you said to her...that you really didn’t love me. You loved her.”

Then Elizabeth just fell apart. It was catharsis, like something was being cut right out of her. I held her so tight, and I rocked her in the front seat of the van. After a time, I looked at her and said, “Elizabeth, does Kelly have a daddy?” She said, “Yes, but he just moved away.” So I held Elizabeth’s face, looked into her eyes, and said, “Listen to me. I will always love you. That doesn’t change. Don’t ever doubt my love, and if you do doubt my love, come tell me so I can remind you and you can remember. We’ll do this in remembrance.”

Jesus came to tell each of you that you have a Daddy who loves you very much.  
So I was telling Elizabeth: Abide in my love.

What had gotten into Elizabeth?—a lie. A lie that each of us has heard: “The Father doesn’t love you, and you want Him to love you. So you better pick some fights, win some battles, get some knowledge, make yourself in His image, and assert yourself.”

You know, that’s what an unfruitful grapevine is: a branch that asserts itself...just more self. It grows and grows and grows...but not with fruit. The world confuses growth with fruit. So if things get bigger, we say, “Look at all the fruit!” But bigger and bigger branches are actually less and less fruit. All kinds of things grow:

- cancer grows
- the national debt grows
- our waistlines grow
- wickedness grows
- church buildings, budgets, and attendance grow
- human religion grows, and we can make it grow with our flesh—the knowledge of good and evil
- Israel grew...full of itself. Israel was “blessed to be a blessing to all the peoples of the world.” Graced to be graceful. But Israel became full of itself. And fruit is not.

Paul writes, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faith, and self-control.” And he writes, “Faith, hope, and love abide.” And what’s the fruit of the vine? That night Jesus held a cup of it saying, “This is the new covenant in my blood.” My blood. The old covenant is works of the flesh. The new covenant is the grace of God. The production of grace is rather counterintuitive, like the production of grapes and wine.

Well, Elizabeth and I sat in the van. She sat on my lap. We sat in the van drinking grace, abiding in our abode, enjoying the fruit of the vine.

What if this entire world is about producing that fruit so we can enjoy it at home on our Father’s lap forever? According to John’s Revelation, “The harvest of this earth” is bread and

wine. How do you produce more fruit like that? That was the question as they journeyed from the last supper to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus would be delivered up. In John 15:2, Jesus says, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away." That can be translated "take away," or more commonly, "take up" or "lift up." That makes sense, because these branches are "in Him." He wouldn't throw them away. When a vinedresser finds a vine that's growing along the ground, he lifts that vine up and ties it to a trellis, for on the ground, in the dirt, out of the light, the vine won't bear fruit. When you're growing in the wrong direction, the Vinedresser will discipline you. He'll take you out of the dirt and tie you to a place in the sun.

Hebrews 12: "The Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives." *Every* son.

Hebrews 5:8: Even Jesus, the Son, "learned obedience through what He suffered." He learned obedience! And He was never disobedient. Yet He does bear our disobedience. He suffers with us and in us.

He is the vine and certainly the life in every branch in Him. But now listen to what Jesus says next: "Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it may bear more fruit." Maybe you've had this experience: Everything is growing, and you've been obedient (at least more than ever before), and there's fruit—I mean, real fruit! And then, all of a sudden, all your efforts get taken away in epic fashion. You cry, "What did I do wrong?!" Well, maybe it's not because you did something wrong...but because you did something right. You bore fruit, and now the vinedresser says, "Great! Now it's time for even more fruit! I'll cut down to the root—the stump—Jesus."

I'm telling you, the time in my life when I thought I was being most fruitful and experiencing the most growth and being the most obedient so far, the Vinedresser came along and cut it all away with His Word and for the sake of His Word. Fifteen years of growth, 15 years of labor, heart, mind, and soul, and when it happened, I cried over and over, "Father, what the hell are you doing?"

Think about it: I bet that was the disciples' prayer that night. Three years, thousands of people, miracles, power, and fruit...and now the Word had cut them to the quick: "I'm leaving." And it's not like Jesus didn't feel that pain. I think He feels all the pain. Later that day, this was His prayer: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The ultimate man, *Eschatos* Adam, was being pruned as all our flesh, all our works, all our pride was cut away. Humanity cut right down to the stump, hanging on a cross, Jesus—the Holy Seed.

But let me ask: Has it born fruit? Did Jesus and Christ and Him crucified bear fruit? Yes! At the cross our old selves were cut away, and in that place God's grace remains and begins to grow. What happens to the part that's cut away?—our flesh, our old man, our works? Well, the Vinedresser throws all that "refuse" into the fire. "Whatever gain I had," writes Paul of all his religious accomplishments, "I count as refuse." In John 15:6, Jesus says something that terrifies a lot of people, because folks have explained it this way: "Abide in my love, or I'll torment you endlessly with fire." I don't know about you, but I have a hard time abiding in the arms of someone who might decide to torment me endlessly with fire.

Well, consider:

1. Vinedressers just aren't into torturing dead branches endlessly with fire. The fire simply disposes of the dead refuse.
2. These branches are already dead. They're not attached to the vine. Literally Jesus says, "If anyone may not remain in me, he was cast out as a branch, and was

withered, and they gathered them and cast them into the fire, and they are destroyed.” You know, whatever is dead in me needs to be destroyed. It’s necrotic. And if anyone is *only* dead—they have no life, no breath, no soul, no Jesus in them, they should be destroyed.

3. But in Scripture many things are destroyed by fire: Sodom, Jerusalem, Israel, the earth...all destroyed. And then they show up again, brand new.
4. I watched my father die. He exhaled this world and inhaled the next. His dust, his flesh, his body was cast off. We had it burned, because he was done with it. It had withered and gotten stiff and would have begun to stink. Mom has the ashes on the breakfront in the TV room, and Dad has a new body full of new wine and joy. Jesus was the first fruit of the new creation, and now my dad is a fruit too: eternal, indestructible, yet fashioned here in space and time with love.

Well, I can’t understand all of God’s judgments, but I do know all judgment has been given to Jesus. I know God is love, and Jesus is the presence of love, the presence of my Father. So I can abide in His love, even when I’m being pruned, especially when I’m being pruned. It’s in that place that the fruit is formed.

I called Elizabeth this week up at CSU and asked if I could talk about her and even her night at Cleo Wallace Hospital eight years ago. She said yes, with some minor conditions. Elizabeth is an incredible kid. All my kids are. But eight years ago, she was going through hell, and I was going through hell. At that time, my Dad was dying, and people thought I was worried about him, but I really wasn’t. He knew how to die, but Elizabeth didn’t. She was a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, and for a few years it just felt like she’d been drifting away. That summer, she had some real problems. She broke some of my commandments. But I didn’t really care about that. I cared that she felt no longer at home with me.

It got worse and worse. She battled depression and fear. That fall she went to a counselor, and one evening she mentioned thoughts of death. The counselor called the authorities, and that night they came and took Elizabeth away. At the time, I’d just published a book, and my church had grown from the smallest in my Presbytery to the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest in the west. I had felt so powerful, successful, and strong. But I remember thinking, “God, I don’t care about any of those things. All I want is Elizabeth back on my lap. She waited for me at the back gate; I’ll wait forever for her.”

One day, at that time, Susan was praying, and she just cried to God, “What are you doing?” She heard Him answer, “I’m saving her.” God has some weird ways of saving us, doesn’t He? And it’s far more than saying some prayer and getting your ticket punched.

Well, I remember that night. We drove down to the Cleo Wallace psychiatric facility. They brought Elizabeth into the room, and we had to speak to her with a state counselor present. It just about killed me. I felt so fruitless, so utterly powerless, like all my strength had been taken away. Fortunately, she only had to stay for one night, but the weeks that followed were pretty rough.

One day I was preparing to leave town in order to speak at Westmont College. As I left for the airport, Elizabeth handed me an envelope and said, “Dad, you have to promise me you won’t open this until you’re on the plane and it has pulled back from the terminal.” I swallowed and said, “OK.” I figured it might contain all kinds of horrible things. Well, I was dying inside, and the moment the plane pulled back from the terminal, I ripped open the envelope and found this letter. She had written it that night at Cleo Wallace—on the night I felt so thoroughly weak and fruitless.

Dear Daddy,

Right now I'm sitting in my bed, I just came back from talking to you. I feel broken inside to know that you are in the same building as me but I can't be with you right now. All I really want right now is for you to hold me and tell me you love me and I will make it through this time.

Then she shares a picture she saw in her mind:

I was 3 yrs old again and you were holding me singing a song. The lyrics of the song say, "Everything is going to be alright, rockaby." And then Jesus is holding both of us together singing, "Everything is going to be alright, rockaby." And as Jesus said to us everything is going to be alright, he is rocking us to sleep.... I love you so much, no words can describe. I am truly sorry. Your Girl Elizabeth

When I read that, I nearly screamed out loud on the plane. She was *on my lap*, and check this out: I was on Jesus' lap. Just as I wanted Elizabeth on my lap, Jesus wanted me on His lap. She was emptied of her pride, her ego, her self...and drinking my grace. I was emptied of my pride, my ego, my self...and drinking God's grace. She was abiding in me, and I was abiding in Jesus. Jesus was abiding in us. His life is the new wine we were drinking.

You know, maybe this entire world...creation and fall, Abraham, Israel, Jerusalem, even Jesus dying in Jerusalem...maybe all your success and all your failure...maybe everything is simply about getting us home to our Father's lap where we abide in our abode and drink His love as He drinks our love—His love in us.

Maybe all He wants is you...at home on His lap.

### **Communion**

On that night He took the bread and broke it saying, "This is my body broken for you. Take and eat, and do it in remembrance of me." In the same way, He took the cup and said, "This is the new covenant in my blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you, in remembrance of me. As often as you drink this cup, do it in remembrance of me." Remember, remember, remember. "I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new, with you, in my Father's kingdom."

Israel wouldn't abide in the vine. Human religion won't abide. It's all about growing itself. So Israel was pruned right down to the root—Jesus. But the Israel of God would grow from the root. And even that night, it was bearing fruit. That night, John (the Son of Thunder), who had been so full of himself, rested his head on Jesus' *kolpos*—translated "chest," and sometimes "lap." I don't know exactly how it looks for you. Sometimes it's talking, sometimes listening, sometimes walking. But come abide in His love. Abide in this, your abode. In Jesus' name, believe the Gospel and worship.

### **Benediction**

[Movie clip from *A Walk in the Clouds*]

[A fire burns the vineyard. Afterward, a branch is taken to the father, who cuts it.]

Father: *It's alive! This...the root...of your life. The root of your family, planted to grow.*

That was the root with which they originally planted the vineyard.



The Word of God, with whom and through whom all things have been made, the root of David, the holy seed, has been implanted in your heart. Abide there in His love. You're home.

Where do you go when you're tired?  
Overwhelmed?  
Ashamed?

He's saying, "Would you make me your home? Would you invite me into your current home?" You can't clean up that place right now. He needs to clean it up. But He longs to abide with you there. He doesn't wait for you to clean it up. Think of your home. Say, "Jesus, I give you my home. I'd like you to be my home. Thank you. Amen."

Abide in His love, and fruit will happen. In Jesus' name, believe the gospel. Amen.

*Disclaimer: This document is a draft and has not been edited by the author. Therefore, there may be discrepancies. Some discrepancies may be minor; some may have to do with theology. When in doubt, please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website and don't be shy about informing us of errors.*