

Sixth Sunday of Easter
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Henry Joel Cadbury was professor of Divinity at Harvard and one of the translators of the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament. Once in a Friends Meeting for Worship, he rose and said: "There are two kinds of Friends in our Society, and two kinds of people in the world; there are **therefore** people, and there are **however** people. **Therefore** people say, "There are children going to bed hungry in our community. **Therefore** ..." and they proceed to devise and define the ways in which they can meet the need in their community. **However** people make the same beginning statement - "There are children going to bed hungry in our community" - but they follow it with, "However..." and they explain why nothing can be done about it. What makes the difference between **Therefore** people and **However** people? I think the answer may be found in the Gospel reading for today.

The Gospel of John is very much about "abiding" - where Jesus abides and how we who believe in Jesus shall abide. John is fond of this word "abide". He uses the term over fifty in his writings, and once in the gospel reading for today. The various translations we use add some depth to the text by substituting "dwell" or "stay" or "remain", but the Greek root is the same - "to abide"

When the words of John chapter 14 were spoken, the disciples had spent a lot of intimate time with Jesus, but the honeymoon period was about to come to an end. The expectations of the disciples were unrealistic and untimely, and things were fixing to get tough. They had hoped for some spectacular demonstration, which would convince the people that Jesus was their Messiah. They had hoped that the Kingdom would be established, and they had hoped for positions of power and prominence in the new regime.

In chapter 15, Jesus would tell the disciples the facts about their future. He would not be heralded as Israel's king, but instead, he would be hated. They, too, would soon experience the hostility of an unbelieving nation. This should not have come as shock, because Christ's rejection had been prophesied for centuries. But they were shocked, nonetheless.

The nature of the relationship between Jesus and his followers was going to change from a physical one to one which was spiritual, and the means of sustaining this kind of relationship were described for them, and for us.

What does it mean to "abide in Christ" to have the Spirit abide in us? Underlying the meaning of this term is the idea of belief. In chapter 6 we find that "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him." **Abiding** then requires a belief in the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. It is a

dependence on his providing for life and strength that is emphasized. There is also the idea of remaining or enduring that is implied by the word "abide". This is certainly the meaning of the term when Jesus says "You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should remain". **Abiding** then, is believing, depending, and persevering.

Yet another dimension of abiding in Christ is presented when Jesus commands "Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; abide in my love." Abiding in the love of Christ also means obedience. This is the **how** of our Christian abiding. "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." The finest of illustrations of this kind of abiding is found in the life of Jesus. His life was marked by a total submission and obedience to the will of God.

One result of our obedience to his command is joy. Obedience brings joy into our experience as it did for Jesus. Not wishing to leave the commandment to abide in his love in abstract terms Jesus gives a very specific and practical example: "This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." The ultimate demonstration of love was about to be witnessed by the disciples. Jesus would lay down his life for his friends. If this love is also to be experienced by his disciples, they too must be willing to give themselves to and for others. I heard a story once of a man who was waxing eloquent to his wife of how much he loved her. He told her he would even die for her. "That won't be necessary," she responded, unimpressed, "just pick up that dish towel and help me with these dishes." Few of us will be required to pay the ultimate price of friendship. All of us need to be willing to do so and to show it in simple acts of sacrificial kindness.

The abiding of obedience results in an intimacy which cannot be experienced in any other way. Abiding in Christ by fully accepting and internalizing His commands changes our relationship from that of slaves to that of friends. Abiding in Christ in its simplest terms is trusting in Christ enough to accept and obey his word.

If we understand and apply this passage well, it will certainly insure that we are **Therefore** people rather than **However** people. Most of us tend to be preoccupied with our performance as Christians, rather than with the person of Christ. We are more interested in results than in simply resting, abiding in him. We want to appropriate his power when we are troubled, but we fail to appreciate his presence. **Abiding** places the importance on the source of our life and strength, but we frequently want to seek the product of our union with him. And so, we have the cart before the horse.

Abiding is our obligation; fruitfulness in God's concern. We are called not to successfulness, but to faithfulness **Therefore** people understand this. They know

that the power to lovingly minister to others comes from God, not from ourselves. **However** people never get it.

This is the lesson we need to learn today. Human beings tend to become preoccupied with results. We want to have guidance, but then we ignore the Guide. We seek God as the Giver, rather than the Gift. We seek his blessings rather than seeing him as the Blessing. There is no special formula or technique by which fruitfulness can be attained. It results from abiding in Christ. Abiding in its simplest expression is trusting God.

May God enable us to abide in his love and thereby become Therefore people rather than However people.