

Year B, May 6, 2018
6 Easter
Christ Church, Mexia

Today is Rogation Sunday. In the five short years that I've been here – or they may seem long to you, I have yet to lead you on a rogation procession on this day – for a variety of reasons. Rogation days became a part of Western Christianity's celebration in the early sixth century by the direction of the Council of Orleans. Initially they were days of fasting and abstinence on the three days leading up to the celebration of Ascension Day, and a time when farmers would have priests bless their land/crops. Later, it came to include a procession for "beating the bounds" or walking the boundaries of the parish, praying for many things such as government, schools, etc., as well as fertile fields.

I did lead a couple of processions in Cameron, though essentially just around the block on which the church was located. It's difficult to determine boundaries today. And as spread out as we are, it would take a long time to drive, much less walk, boundaries that included us all.

Interestingly, the gospel lesson for today provides a similar conundrum. Jesus apparently tells us to abide in his love. But how do we do that? Abide is not a word in frequent use today. I don't remember it much while as was growing up, outside of an occasional mention in church. In the vernacular, it seemed to be used as a sign of dislike, at least in the south – "I cannot abide him or his ways." Or perhaps sometimes to express agreement or acquiescence when paired with the preposition "by", such as, "I will abide by your decision."

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the transitive verb form as: to bear patiently, or tolerate; to endure without yielding, or withstand; to wait for or await; to accept without objection; to remain stable or fixed in a state; to continue in a place or sojourn. Synonyms may include: bear, suffer, hang around, tarry, or persist, among others. That seems to be a lot to absorb, especially for a word that has been around since before the 12th century.

In the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, it notes that the word abide is represented in the OT (KJV) by 12 different Hebrew words and in the NT by a similar number of Greek words. The Old

English word generally meant: to await, remain, lodge, sojourn, dwell, continue or endure. So, we have a large range of meaning that could be used to determine what it means for us to abide in Jesus.

The Rev. Brian Hedges uses the parable of the vines and branches found in John 15 to discuss such abiding – “whoever abides in me and I in him...” and bearing fruit. He believes that to abide in Jesus, or his love, three things are implied. First, there is a connection. The branch is connected to the vine; there is a mutual connection. Second, there is dependence. Without the vine, the branch is useless; we derive everything from Jesus. And third, there is continuance. We must never quit depending upon Jesus or believing in Jesus.

And it is probably worth noting here that the scripture today tells us that Jesus wants us to abide with him so that his joy may be in us and our joy might be complete. Also, Nehemiah (8:10) reminds us that the joy of the Lord is our strength, and nothing may exemplify these preceding concepts more than the following story:

“On May 8, 1984, Benjamin A. Weir, veteran Presbyterian missionary to Lebanon, was kidnapped at gunpoint by Shiite Muslims in Beirut. During his sixteen-month imprisonment, he was constantly threatened with death. On his first night in captivity, one of his captors came to him and told him to face the wall, which he did. ‘Now take your blindfold off and put this on.’ The man handed Weir a pair of ski goggles with the eye holes covered in thick plastic adhesive tape. He could see no light. In Weir’s mind, the sun had set. He later wrote: *In the twilight there came to mind the hymn, ‘Abide with me – fast falls the eventide.’ I felt vulnerable, helpless, lonely. I felt tears in my eyes. Then I remembered the promise of Jesus, ‘If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.’*

‘Lord, I remember your promise, and I think it applies to me, too. I’ve done nothing to deserve it but receive it as a free gift. I need you. I need your assurance and guidance to be faithful to you in this situation. Teach me what I need to learn. Deliver me from this place and this captivity, if it is your will. If it is not your will to set me free, help me to accept whatever is involved. Show me your gifts and enable me to recognize them as coming from you. Praise be to you.’ For the next sixteen months, his hope and his joy were that he was not simply abiding in captivity, he was abiding in Christ and thus able to ‘bear much fruit.’” (Robert Morgan, p. 2)

However, you wish to interpret or understand abiding in Christ or his love, remember that to do so is essentially to experience the relationship and the love that God and Jesus share with each other. There is so much joy, and strength, in that.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.