



GPS GUIDE: SEPTEMBER 25, 2022 G r o w . P r a y . S t u d y .

Series: Inside Out

Sermon: Abide

John 15: 1-8

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just 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. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Daily Prayer – At the conclusion of each day's meditation offer this as your prayer:

I breathe in God's grace.

May it transform my insecurities

So that I breathe out God's love

I breathe in God's love

May it transform my fears

So that I breathe out God's hope

I breathe in God's hope

May it transform my doubts

So that I breathe out God's faithfulness

I breathe in God's faithfulness

May it transform my heart

So that I breathe out the Good News of Christ Jesus I breathe in the Good News of Christ Jesus

May it transform me

So that I breathe out God's grace...

Monday: Read Isaiah 5: 1-7

The prophet Isaiah uses the metaphor of the constant care of the vinedresser for the vineyard as the primary metaphor throughout this passage - recounting the vinedresser's tender care and hard work in the vineyard. Despite even the Divine Vinedresser's best efforts, the vineyard yielded "wild grapes" (*beu'shim*: the term suggests that not only are the grapes unusable, but that they emit a rancid odor/stench). In this passage, God describes the attributes that God granted to the people of Judah that should have yielded the perfect wine of justice and righteousness in their society. Despite all of their divinely-granted privileges, however, the people snubbed justice for bloodshed and righteousness for the wailing of the oppressed. Within the larger context of Isaiah, one can easily discern the types of injustices that Judah perpetrated: they do not defend the cause of the widow and orphan (1:23), they coveted and stored up wealth for themselves (1:29), they oppressed the poor (3:14-15), they acquitted the guilty and deprived the innocent of their rights (5:23). In congregations of privilege such as ours, this passage stands as a challenge. Are we using our privilege to produce the sweet wine of justice in our society? Or does our propensity to remain silent in our privilege result in injustice that will ultimately repulse the God whom we claim to worship? Do we set out on quests for righteousness in our society, or are our actions representing the Church creating more harm than good? The message from the prophet is clear even today: God hears the cry of the oppressed and is aggrieved. God intends to use God's people to promote justice and equity. How do we, as a congregation, live out God's love and care by cultivating justice in our community? In what ways can we grow in this calling to be God's agents of justice?

Tuesday: Read Psalm 80

Psalm 80 mixes two metaphors for God's relationship with the people. Mrs. Ivey, my high school English teacher, would not have approved of such mixing, but in this case the two dominant metaphors create a rich prayer for help. The first metaphor is of God as the "Shepherd of Israel" and the people as God's "flock." The second metaphor (vv. 8-13) is the image of the vine and gardener which recalls God's history of faithful love by making the analogy between that history and a gardener planting a vineyard. But while Isaiah 5 (Monday's reading) seeks to spur the people to repent, the psalmist seeks to spur God to repent: "Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted" (vv. 14-15). The rhetorical strategy in Isaiah 5 has the parental God saying to the rebellious children, "After all the faithful love that I have shown you, why are you rebelling against me?" Here, the rhetorical strategy has the suffering children saying to the parental God, "After all the faithful love that you have shown us, why are you allowing us to suffer?" The refrain builds in intensity each time it occurs, by adding to God's name, moving from the more generic "God" to the more proper and personal "O Lord God of hosts":

- Restore us, O God... (v. 3)
- Restore us, O God of hosts... (v. 7)
- Restore us, O LORD God of hosts... (v. 19)

This building up of intensity has the effect of turning up the volume on and urgency of the people's desperate cry for help. The psalm closes with the people vowing to continue to "call on your name." This promise then leads to the last occurrence of the refrain, which employs the most personal and intense form of God's name in the psalm: "O LORD God of hosts." God's "name" is a shorthand formula for the relationship between

God and God's people. God gave the people the name so they could call upon God in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, and so that they would bear God's name in their mission to love, bless, and save the nations. Have there been times in your life that you called out to God in a time of suffering? When have you been in need of restoration that only God could provide? In what ways do you call upon God to help you become more faithful in living the mission of God's love and blessing to others?

Wednesday: Read Jeremiah 18: 1-6

Jeremiah invites us to see God as an artisan and artist. The image is not new in the scriptures. Genesis 1 portrays God as the first poet, designer, metalworker, and landscaper, as God speaks, divides, fashions, and populates the cosmos. In Genesis 2:7 God first shapes clay, sculpting and forming humankind from the sediment of the earth. As God's hands knead and smooth the moist dirt, God breathes life into God's new creation, so that the human being is simultaneously grounded by this connection to earth and animated by the very breath of God. Now, in Jeremiah 18, we hear that God did not simply shape us once for all. To this day, God tells Jeremiah, God's people are like clay that has not yet been fired. Clay that has been fired dries, shrinks, and hardens into a permanent structure and shape. It may be decorative, is often functional, and is most often designed for a single purpose - a brick or tile, bowl or plate, a mug, a vase, a pitcher, a storage jar, a lamp. It is easy to break. Such clay, now dry ceramic, is often lovely and as often useful. It is specialized. It is also rigid and brittle. Clay that has not been fired may be shaped and reshaped infinitely. It is a material of possibility: moldable, flexible, responsive. Though God shaped humankind and breathed life into its nostrils, God did not fire the clay from which God made us. No one of us is only a tile, a pitcher, or a lamp. God is able to shape us and reshape us, and God labors tirelessly at the wheel on our behalf. God assesses our character, perceives our strengths and our weaknesses, builds on our strengths, and, when needed, works diligently to re-form us. Do you like the image of God as a potter and you as God's clay? How do you stay moldable and responsive to God's creative work in your life? Are there places in your life that you need to allow God to re-form?

Thursday: Read Romans 8:12-17

We are all part of a family. That is something we all have experienced in some way. Birth family, adoptive family, stepfamily, foster family, institutional family. Family determines so much of who we are, whether we're talking genes or experience, family of origin or the people who become family. But we are also all part of God's family - children of God, says Paul. Loving, supportive, accepting, encouraging, helping. That sounds easier than it is. Because real life is made up of real people, we usually act like real people, meaning imperfect, flawed people. But we gather together anyway. *Together*. That's the operative word. If allowed only one word to describe the Church at its best, I would choose "together." Together, a community made whole in diversity and heterogeneity, stronger because we are different. Who is included in your family? How can we abide *together* in Christ together even though we are diverse? When have you experienced strength in diverse perspectives, experiences, or opinions? How has that experience drawn you into God's family?

Friday: Read John 14: 1-14

On the eve of his crucifixion Jesus addresses his followers: *Do not be afraid*. I love the way this passage presents the very human, natural, fears and questions of the disciples precisely because we still have the same kinds of fears and questions. In a few words, Jesus paints a wonderful word picture of the life to come: my Father's house; many rooms; a prepared place; a prepared way to get there; a trusted guide; not being left alone to find our own way; ending with being with Jesus again. But as usual, the passage does not leave us without inner, spiritual work of our own to do. Namely, to trust and to believe INTO (not "in") Jesus: *And you know the way to the place where I am going ...If you know me, you will know my Father also* (The NRSV translation of "believe in" would be better as "believe into" That is, be bonded with Jesus, trust Jesus, abide in Jesus) Then Jesus says, "And you know the way," which implies a pre-existing knowledge on the part of the disciples. Jesus is not telling them anything new; they already know (and you know). Thomas is the first to make a statement and then ask the question that is our question: *How can we know the way?* Jesus' response to this question is one that has caused enormous suffering and harm through the centuries by separating people into groups of "believers" and "non-believers." But I think we haven't read his response for the plain statement of truth that it is. Jesus first says: *I am the way, and the truth, and the life*. And then he says: *No one comes to the Father, except through me*. Now, if we simply substitute "me" in the second statement with Jesus' "I am" in the first statement, we get: *No one comes to the Father, except through the way, the truth, and the life*. That statement is a plain statement of the simple truth that the life to come will be a way of truth and life - and thank God for that. And, since Jesus has said that he will come and take us to himself, we can trust that we will not be abandoned and left on our own to find this way. What does it mean to you to "believe into" Jesus? To trust Jesus? To Abide in Jesus? How can we know the way to God? How can we see God?

Saturday: Read Micah 6:1-8

The scriptures portray real flesh and blood examples of lovingkindness, loving tenderly, loving steadfastly: the Good Samaritan who dares not pass by another human being even when that other was considered an enemy; the father in the prodigal son who did not choose one son over another but found his two arms wide enough to embrace both his sons; Mary and the other women standing at the foot of the cross no matter how painful and frightening; the woman with her alabaster flask who broke it open and poured it out without holding back; and Jesus who wept, prayed, broke bread, touched, and healed people. And yet in our society, to love kindness does not come easily. Perhaps this is because loving tenderly involves one knowing confidently one is loved and is able to take the risk to be moved, to be vulnerable, and to be able to see another person's suffering as one's own. Have you ever considered that to *abide* in Christ means knowing down deep – with every fiber of your being – that God dwells in you and provides you with all that is necessary to bear Christ's goodness in the world? How does that make you feel? How do you describe abiding in Christ? How can you live it out in the world around you?