

What Now?

- [Acts 8:26-40](#)
- [1 John 4:7-21](#)
- [John 15:1-8](#)

“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.” I imagine that many of us have prayed for something and it hasn’t happened. So what’s that about? Does that mean that we are not really abiding in Jesus? Or does it mean that Jesus was lying? Or what?

One of the confusing things about English is that we use the same word to mean you singular and you plural. In Greek it is clear that Jesus is not talking to us as individuals but as a group. He’s not saying “If you Caro want something just ask and you’ll get it.” Rather he is saying “If y’all want something ask for it and God will provide it.” But even that’s not quite right because it isn’t just ‘want’ like we might want a better brand of coffee or a perfect sound system. The word is closer to resolve. It seems to mean that the community together has decided and is resolved that something is necessary and if we require it of God it will be provided.

Which is a challenge for us as individualistic Americans. Even though we gather in common prayer together on a Sunday we still tend to think of prayer as an individual thing. We don’t really have a mechanism for coming to a common mind about something, resolving that we need it and then consciously and intentionally asking God for it. We pray together the Prayers of the People, but they can often seem like rote words because we have not said in advance what it is that we the people of God need to pray for.

We don’t have a good way of collectively discerning what God is doing in our midst and how can we get on board with it, or what we truly need to do God’s work.

We are at a challenging time in our common life. The past year and a bit has changed us. It has changed us as individuals and as a community. We are not the people we were last March. Each one of us has grown and changed, hopefully we have grown closer to Christ but maybe not. We have known grief, we have known isolation, we have known loneliness. As a church we have lost friends and loved ones. More among us have died this past year than in previous years.

Next Sunday we will start having services indoors again but we will not be sitting close to one another, we will not be singing, we will not be hugging, we will not be sharing food. We will not all be able to gather at the same time. This is a loss.

But we know that God brings resurrection. We know that out of the loss God will bring something new. Now is the time for us to be discerning and coming to a common mind about what we need for us to carry out God's mission here in this place, on this land, among these people. Now is the time for us to dream dreams and to see visions. What is it that God has in mind for St Benedict's and what is it that we need to be praying for?

How we pray and what we do in this next period of time will determine how we come out of this period of grieving. The Parish Council is meeting this week to review the five year strategic plan. Last year we created goals for the next two years but those may no longer be what we need to do and no longer where we need to focus our prayers.

I don't know.

What I do know is that God is here with us and the Holy Spirit is already preparing and already working to bring that which is new; new joys, new possibilities into our midst.

Going back to the gospel reading, there is a condition in this promise that what we resolve we need will be given to us. Jesus said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you..." This is important. This is the

basis on which we will become truly his disciples, abiding, dwelling in him and his words. Back at the very beginning of John's gospel we hear that God came and dwelled with humanity. Now it is our turn. We get to dwell not just *with* but *in* God.

It is when we are dwelling in God that our needs will be met in such a way that we will truly become disciples. Are you dwelling in God? Am I dwelling in God? Are we dwelling in God? And how would we know for sure?

That's another thing I don't know.

We do have some clues. The disciples gathered together, and Jesus was there with them. Sometimes he showed up physically but he promised that where two or three gathered in his name, there he would be in their midst. After his ascension, when the disciples gathered together the Holy Spirit showed up.

It is the Holy Spirit who guides the church today. It is the Holy Spirit who will guide us into the church we are becoming. It is the Holy Spirit who will teach us to abide in Christ.

If we want to.

I suspect that some of us have grown comfortable with our limited Covid lives. It is surprisingly comfortable to stay home now. It is easy to have a small group of people to relate to. Going out feels like an effort, but so does another Zoom meeting.

Yet the church is a faith community gathered around word and sacrament. That is how we abide together in Christ, by feasting on word and sacrament (not on potlucks though those are good too.) We do need to gather. I salute each one of you who has chosen to gather this morning, whether on-line or here in-person.

How we gather in the immediate future is about to change, again. We are returning to the church yet not as we were before. I ask you each to be

praying and wondering, to be dreaming dreams and asking for visions. How is it that God wants us now to abide in him and to become his disciples? How is it that God wants us to gather now? How is it that God wants us to serve and worship him? How is it that God wants us to be welcoming newcomers into his church?

We know that God's extravagant love does not change. God's love is always dependable, always true. The love that surrounds us and calls us to be our best selves living holy lives that shine with God's light does not change, but our circumstances do. In the reading from Acts we heard that once Philip had baptized the Ethiopian, the Spirit of the Lord snatched him away and he found himself 34 miles away in Azotus. Talk about change!

But it seems that Philip just got up, dusted himself down, and went on with his work, proclaiming the good news to all the towns in that region. And that is what we will do through all the changes that come – We will abide in God's love and listen for the prompting of the Holy Spirit; and we will continue, as our baptismal covenant says, in the apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in the prayers, while we continue to preach the good news of God's love every which way we can.