

# Fifth Sunday of Easter

02.05.2021  
By Trevor Williams

## Introduction

This pandemic has played havoc with so much that makes life worthwhile. Many have suffered through bereavement, serious illness and long-term disability. All of us have been cut off from relationships that bring meaning, support, and companionship on the way.

- Take a moment to reflect on your experience of being ‘cut off’

- What restores your sense of well-being?

In this passage from John’s Gospel during the last meal with his disciples, Jesus prepares them for the days ahead and how to resist being overwhelmed by extreme violence and suffering. Being cut off can be our experience in a painful conflict.

Jesus suggests to his disciples that the way through is to stay close, to “abide” in him. Jesus uses the image of the vine and its branches to stress the importance of being connected. It is worth remembering that ‘the vine’ was a metaphor for God’s people in the Hebrew scriptures, so when Jesus says ‘I am the true vine’, he is speaking both personally but also in the wider perspective of the community of God’s people.

We will explore together what it may mean for us to “abide”.

---

## Text

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.

---

## Comment

### It's better together

As we are slowly being released from lockdown, I am becoming more aware of how I have been affected loss. I have been fortunate not to suffer bereavement or major tragedy. Rather it has been the consistent drain and loss of what brings nourishment to my life, meeting friends, and freedom to go where you wish when you want. And in saying this I am aware how many people across our world never enjoy such privilege. But for me I recognize the image that vine branch cut off from the vine, withered and fruitless, cut off from what nourishes and gives strength.

We are creatures in relationship. I am a member of Corrymeela and we have a slogan, 'It's better together'. It's not only better, it's the only way, loving relationships are the key to a fulfilled life.

Jesus spent a large proportion of his three years ministry devoted to a small group of disciples, being with them as the days passed, getting to know them as they chatted to him and with one another. Jesus was living out with them the hopeful message he wished to share with the world.

And now as Jesus prepares his disciples for a future they cannot comprehend, when he would no longer be physically present with them, Jesus tells his disciples about the vine branch, that has become unconnected, broken off from the vine, withered and dead, fit for nothing but burning. His message is clear, stay in touch, remain part of me, and you will have fruitful lives enriching and nourishing the lives of others.

### Reconnecting

When we are caught up in conflict, an immediate impulse can be to cease listening and seeking to understand the other. We communicate with them only in fight mode, with the intention of dominating. This deliberate "cutting ourselves off" has a withering and dying effect: the conflict has consumed us.

I have noticed some of my friends who work in mediation and conflict transformation deliberately make a practice of spending time in meditation, mindfulness, reading poetry or calm observation of the natural world. They have learnt that whatever they spend time on, they carry with them and that shapes who they are and how they behave. They have learnt that if they are to be effective enablers of conflict-transformation they need to be available to discern accurately what is happening free from conflict's contagious and corrosive power. They need to be connected to a reservoir of calm and quiet deep within themselves.

### The priority of Resurrection

St Paul insists that the resurrection is the most crucial element of the Christian gospel. (*if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:14*). Paul is assuring the new Church in the gift of eternal life that death is not the end.

In this season of Easter, as we spend time contemplating the resurrection, what it means and why it matters, we quickly move beyond the mechanics of what happened and how could it happen, to the truth that in that event, hope was reborn out of the jaws of disaster. We move beyond the personal assurance of the gift of eternal life, to the truth that the resurrection reveals a new understanding of a new world order. Incessant news bulletins reporting the conflict of good and evil remind us, could lead us to a council of despair. However, the resurrection affirms a deeper reality; evil does not have the last word, God's love is the power that conquers all. God's yes articulated in the resurrection of Jesus is stronger than the most powerful no.

We also need to remember that Good Friday and Easter morning are one and the same event. The path towards Love's victory can be a painful one – the Gethsemane and Good Friday can be part of what we travel through. But the path we are on is sure, it leads to resurrection, hope, and fulfillment. This is something that the disciples came to understand as they gradually took in the meaning of resurrection. It is something we can live by, as we stay close to the Living Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is the Good News!

#### **How do we abide in Christ?**

The centre of the Gospel reading for today are Jesus words "Abide in me as I abide in you" (v 4) But how do we do it? How do we abide? What does it mean?

Religious practice is an obvious route. But religious practice may not be enough. Look at the evil caused by a wrong use of religion in the world. Religious fanatics are often fixated on their observance to religious practice.

The question is what can help us abide in Jesus as he abides in us? Jesus is the icon and fulfillment of human life. In his life we can see the life we are called to follow. It is the focus on the humanity of Jesus that has the power to transform our humanity. But this may seem like an impossible goal for us to reach, and it is. Maybe we can get closer to the truth by starting with Jesus words Abide, as I abide in you. We have received as gift, the presence of God within. In a busy distracting world we can so easily drown out that still small voice.

Religious practice has perhaps its most influential aspect as reminding us of the story of Jesus, his love for the outcast and sinner, the oppressed, the weak and the infirm. We can recognize that we are among those whom Jesus chose to love and in contemplation of Jesus' story we can be drawn to love more fully.

But my friends who work on finding ways out of conflict, have reminded me that other practices that allow us to slow down, become more aware, and pay attention to ourselves, others and the world around us, can be as powerful a practice as any 'religious' observance in drawing us towards a more human life, and draw us closer to Jesus. We are all different, our needs are different, one size will not fit all. But finding what helps us become more loving is a start to finding out what it means to abide in Jesus.

---

## Response

From your own experience, what does it mean when Jesus says 'Abide in me, as I abide in you'?

Spend some time with a piece of art, a poem, a piece of music. Pay attention deeply. In what way does this link to the invitation to "Abide"?

Many people say they find God in the garden, or in nature. Do you feel this is a second rate spiritual experience, and not the real thing? Why?

How much is 'abiding' in Jesus to do with the quality of relationships in the faith community to which we belong?

What is your experience of Church? Is it truly a Jesus community for you? If not what could you do to make it so?

---

## Prayer

God of community, Three in One,

You have made us in your image

to be fulfilled in relationship with one another.

Through our conflicts

we can be cut off

like dried up, withered branches

and find it difficult to reconnect again.

Jesus, abiding in us, lead us to recognize you within,

And seek you in those you have given us

To form a loving community of compassion and care.

Amen

---

Season: Easter

Themes: Inner Journey