

God of the living word, give us faith to receive your message, the wisdom to know what it means, and the courage to put it into practice. Amen.

Last week, Joan opened up for us what it is to abide in God, to abide in Christ, to be part of the vine, to grow into and from the vine. This week, as we read a little more of chapter 15, St John takes us further, suggesting that, as we abide in Christ (like a branch abides in a vine) we abide in God's love, because it's in abiding in God's love that our joy may be complete. But St John doesn't leave it there either. This whole chapter is centred around what it is to abide: to abide in Christ; to abide in God; to abide in Christ like a branch abides in the vine; that if we abide we can bear fruit, even if it means we get pruned from time to time; that if we abide, what we ask for will be given to us; that we should abide in Christ's love and so abide in God's love; that we should love one another; that we are chosen; that we are to bear fruit that will last. As a little aside, I wonder how many "abide"s and "love"s are in John 15... maybe you could count them and let me know!

In all seriousness, and in spite of feeling like we might have seen and heard the word "abide" a lot in these last two weeks' readings, St John has a point. Someone I trained with shared a sermon where they suggested that abiding in the vine means our lifeblood, our very source comes from God. We're not just "bolted on" like a lego block onto another lego block, but we are part of the vine and the vine is part of us. All we need to thrive is drawn in through the roots, moves through the trunk and flows through the branches. For me, God is the ground the roots are planted in where all

we need is found, God is the trunk that holds firm, God is flowing through our cells and synapses, knotted into us at the branches. As the First Letter of John stated last week 'God is Love, and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them'; there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; we love because God first loves us. If this is what pulses through our veins, our lifeblood, our source what does that mean?

If God is the root, the trunk, the source, and we are the branches, nourished, enriched and enlivened by God, the world opens up for us. If God is the source, we can begin to see that there is no lack of love. If God is the source, we begin to see that growth and abundance don't necessarily mean the same thing, that sustainability and care and health are part of love. If God is the source, we can begin to see that pruning both helps us bear fruit but also helps us become more fully ourselves, diverting our energy towards reconciliation, healing, and compassion. If God is the source, we can begin to see that there's nothing really to be afraid of, because there is enough, because we are loved by God for who we are, because we're not alone. If God is the source, we don't have to map other expectations onto ourselves if they don't fit, because what matters to God is that we are fully ourselves, because God loves us for who we are. If God is the source and loves us for who we truly are, then we can begin to show that love to others, open up space for others to explore what being truly themselves looks like for them.

And the centre point of our Gospel reading today, is the commandment to love one another as we have been loved by Christ, as

we have been loved by the whole of Godself: fully, without limit, willing to lay down our lives for. In this full, without limit, willing to lay down our lives for love, we are invited into partnership; we are chosen for who we are... even when others pass us by or dismiss us; we are encouraged to bear fruit (which I would suggest are the fruit of the Spirit as seen in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control) and the work Jesus himself signed up to from Isaiah 61, to bring good news and relief to the oppressed, to break down oppression and injustice, to care for the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty and release over suppression and captivity, to comfort and provide for those in distress).

It's in this context of loving as we are loved, partnership with God, others and creation, and bearing fruit, that Jesus says the Father will give whatever we ask in Jesus' name. It's not a Christmas list of things for ourselves, and for our privilege and possessiveness to hold on to. Rather its an opening out, a rooting into the love and abundance of the source of our being, a desire for love to be known and shared freely. It is this love that holds us and our understanding of justice, rooted in Christ, inviting us to act against injustice in the world around us. In the context of Black Lives Matter and anti-racism campaigns, its asking God for help as we work on our awareness of our own privilege and dismantling the barriers that have kept Black, Indigenous and People of Colour from accessing what should be freely available to them as it is to White people. In the context of gender and sexuality, its asking God for help as we work through inherited

prejudices and preconceived ideas about what it is to be fully human and fully loved for who we are. In the context of ableism its asking God for help as we consider how our understanding of a “default” body and lived experience keeps marginalising those whose lives and bodies respond differently. In the context of the environment, its asking God for help in acknowledging our part in the Climate Crisis, doing what we can and calling corporations to account for unsustainable practices.

And above all, in all of these and more, its asking for love to abide in us and for us to abide in love. Maybe even going further and asking to become more aware of the love that already holds us close and invites us to go deeper into that love (there is no lack of love after all). To ask for help in the healing of our own hurts so we can be part of world’s healing. To ask how we can love more fully.

With our hearts turned towards others, the world and God in these ways, ‘the Father [really] will give [us] whatever [we] ask [for] in [Christ’s] name.’

Amen.