



April 29, 2018 - Abiding Presence

Given by Rev. Mattei

A few weeks ago a homeless person, Tony, came to see me. He was sitting outside of my office waiting for me to arrive. My evil mind prepared me to hear a sad story leading to a request for a hand out. I was completely blown out of the water when he asked me point blank to baptize him. I was completely surprised and unprepared and in order to take some time and gain clarity I explained that normally I have Preparation to Baptism classes and since he was on his way back home in Tallahassee we wouldn't have time for any of that. I asked him what he knew about Jesus and what brought him to that request. He shared with me his story. As he was talking, a voice reminded me of the Ethiopian eunuch's request: "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" So I called a few of the people present on the premises, walked to the sanctuary and performed the sacrament of Holy Baptism to the joy of all. We greeted him and sent Tony on his way. A few minutes later he came back for a hand-out.

The Acts of the Apostles tell us that the Ethiopian eunuch¹ was a black African from Ethiopia, an educated and affluent person, who rose to the high ranks of leadership in the court of Candice, the queen of Ethiopia (he was her trusted treasurer); a spiritual person who read the Hebrew Scriptures to come closer to God; a humble person who is eager to learn about the Scriptures and is not ashamed to reveal his ignorance and ask for help.

The intervention of Philip is Spirit led (Acts 8:29.) Availability, familiarity and obedience to the Spirit of God train and support people in the discernment process: one knows when to come in and when to leave, when to speak and when to show self-control. (James 1:19) Philip, in other words, could do that because he was filled with the presence of the Spirit and had spent time knowing the Lord. Philip could be said to abide in the Lord. there is no way one is sent as an apostle unless a deep conversion and friendship with the Lord has been developed. One does not become an apostle

¹ <http://www.biblestudy.org/question/what-is-a-eunuch.html>



unless one abides in God and is committed to a life of faithful and consistent prayer and of untiring and persevering spiritual growth.

The word “abide” appears multiple times in today’s Gospel reading, to the point that it’s confusing. “Abiding” is all about the importance of relationships. God’s desire to be in relationship with us is shown in the person of Jesus walking, teaching and healing in the world, and also in the presence of the Holy Spirit with each of us as we serve God in our mundane tasks and daily encounters. God’s abiding presence is celebrated and signified in Holy Communion and in our baptisms.

The abiding takes place in so many hearts and the Spirit’s presence unites us to God, to Jesus and to one another. God’s intention is to be “all in all” (1 Cor 15:28) and unify the Body of Christ (Eph 1:23) but that intention is not always clear to all Christians and even worse not all Christians work toward building the Body of Christ or are aware of God’s desire to abide in all of us and for us to abide in God.

Sometimes it takes some active pruning by God and by us so that more fruit may be produced. When we are pruned, we lose something. When we are pruned, we can be lonely. In the midst of our grief we may wonder “Why?” It is only with time that we can look back and make sense of the pruning, or simply trust that the pruning makes us grow stronger. To bear fruit we have to trust that God is with us in our Christ-centered decision-making, our justice work, our daily living done in faith, integrity and honor.

If it is true that “in Him we live and move and have our being,” (Acts 17:28) the foundation is already there. Abiding in God might more actively be considered our conscious desire and availability to live in the presence of the divine. The awareness of abiding does not happen automatically: it takes training ourselves in ways that allow our heart to see, like prayer and meditation that eventually will render the abiding habitual.

When we consider that we are called to take an active role in making the abiding happen then we need to consider what part of our life the Spirit of Jesus invites us to catch up with. Maybe there are choices in our daily routine that hinder a consistent practice of the gifts of discipleship (prayer life, Bible study and spiritual reading, generous living, faithful worship, meaningful service and proclamation of the Good News in word and deed.) Maybe we need to prioritize our life in a way that honors God and allows for our personal growth. Maybe we need to be firmer with our pruning and consider that losses might help in bearing more fruit. Do we need to set a prayer and study time during the day and be faithful to it? Do we need to partner with other people for our prayer and study time so we get support and accountability? Do we need to review our life style so we may use our resources, gifts of God, for the benefit of others as well? Do we need to manage our time in such a way that we share part of it serving



others? And if our life is already full of activities, would it be desirable to cut back and enjoy silence and meditation?

A rich spiritual life of abiding in God is available to all and wanted by God. All God wants is for us to learn how to become more aware of and enjoy the presence of God all around us and to have a rich and meaningful spiritual life. (Jn 10:10) May we find it in ourselves to deepen our relationship with God and find ways to abide in God. Amen.

