

# SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

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While preparing for my first sermon with my internship congregation, I was told a story about the intern just before me. For his first sermon he read the gospel, and then said, "today's texts say all there is to say", and he sat down. I was told there were looks of shock on many of the faces in the congregation and they wondered for a moment what the council was doing bringing this person in to serve them as intern.

As surprising as this act is, there are times when it is tempting to follow in his footsteps. Sometimes we have lessons, like the Acts text, that are very familiar. You may think, I already know what this means, do we really need to discuss it again? You may know that today on Pentecost Sunday we celebrate the coming of the Spirit and the beginning of the Christian church, right? But don't worry I will not try to get out of the sermon.

Since it is Pentecost, I initially thought it would important to discuss the Acts reading. So I was on a search over this last week for a fresh way to talk about it. I went to the pastor's periscope study and found it interesting that none of those pastors were planning on preaching on the Acts text. Someone mentioned how the word abiding sticks out in the John text and I thought it might be the fresh approach to the Pentecost texts I was looking for.

So what does the word abide mean to us? We probably wouldn't ask any of our friends or relatives to come and abide with us but we may sense it may have that meaning. We know that abide is a word we do not use much anymore. Many of the uses for it listed in the dictionary are obsolete. But perhaps there is a reason for keeping this word in our vocabulary, even if we only encounter it in scripture. This word has many helpful aspects.

Abide is a word pointing towards where. When we abide in a place, it goes beyond just staying there. We would not say that we abide in a hotel, because even though the bed may be comfortable, it does not have that feeling of home. And getting to a point of abiding can take time, even when we really like our new place. Some people who move often develop a plan to feel at home as soon as possible. For me, it is important to get rid of the boxes as soon as possible and hang up pictures on the wall because making this effort helps me realize I am going to be in this place and make it my home.

We may also associate this where of abiding with our congregation. We may know the congregation is much more than a building but there is a certain amount of comfort in having a stable place for worship every Sunday morning. You know where to go so you can focus on worshipping. Jesus promises to be with us whenever two or more are gathered in his name. This type of abiding is anchored each week as we proclaim the good news and come to the table for the nourishment that last beyond the moment.

Abiding also has an aspect of when, pointing to times of Christ's presence leading us to deep-down joy or being sustained through experiences of grief. Beyond these events that may appear out-of-the-ordinary, there is an abiding in the routines of our daily lives. We may not notice these at the moment they occur, but that does not mean they do not occur. Psalm 121 reminds us the God will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore. To not have abiding in our lives diminishes us. The evidence of this is that marriages end in divorce, friendships are broken, contracts are bought out.

So we may now come to the conclusion that abiding has to do with persevering, continuing, lasting, being ever present and Christ does all of this with us with God and the Holy Spirit. If Christ abides with us, how are we to abide with Christ? On one hand, it does not mean that we have to do anything. Through grace, Christ promises to be with us. And not only will Christ be with us, but also the Spirit, referred to as the advocate. This advocate does not just sit back and watch, but is dynamic and active in the world ushering in the truth.

As this spirit of truth permeates the world, we are able to keep Jesus commandments. John tells us in chapter 15, "this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you". This love leads us into action, doing the greater works Jesus told us we would be capable of. They will spring to life not out of some sense of guilt or responsibility, but out of the love for others flowing through us because of the presence of the Spirit. Who knows what we could do as a community with Jesus' help. I have to say I am looking forward to exploring that with you.

Before I get too far alone, I wanted to tell you the end of the story I started in the beginning. The intern got back up and preached his sermon and the congregation breathed a sigh of relief that they did not call a crazy person to be their intern. And speaking of endings, it seems to me that this discussion of abiding leads us back to the Acts passage. Even though we may be approaching the text through the back door, so to speak, I think we have the new way of looking at this text. Rather than concerning ourselves with whether the people gathered were experiencing a miracle of hearing or speaking, we can look at how the Spirit moves us to use our voices. Elizabeth Johnson states:

Finding one's own voice, however, haltingly, imparts the power of the Spirit crying out. The boldness to hear the claim of conscience and follow its deep impulses even in the face of loss, the courage to taste righteous anger and allow it to motivate critical resistance to evil, the wiliness to utter the prophetic word. These occurrences inscribe the movement of the Spirit's compassion into the ambiguity of the world.

We are called to shout even when it may be uncomfortable and to listen to others as they shout even when it could be painful. We are called to not be silent when faced with injustice even when we might be criticized. If you were another congregation, I may tell you stories about times when I spoke out to use as an example. But I know many of you are aware of how to speak out. This congregation has done a good job of doing this for quite a long time. And with the help of the Spirit, we will continue shouting, continue speaking the truth and continue to work for justice in the church and in the world.