

May 6, 2018

I John 5:1-6
John 15:9-17

“I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

Love God and love your neighbor. Foundation of our faith.

“Love God and do what you want.” Augustin, really “love and do what you will.” But in that order.

Love, love, love – the Beatles

Sounds wonderful. Sounds easy.

Sounds a little too Pollyanna

Fact is, God’s love, in which Jesus abides and in whose love we are to abide, is anything but easy

Abiding in Jesus’ love can be a very hard thing to do

But let me stop and brief reflect on what Jesus means when he says “abide in my love”

On the one hand it is to share God’s love as Jesus did with the world around us

To do this we must understand that God’s love comes to us first, otherwise there would be no love for us to share with the world.

It is a circular flow of love – to use Paul’s language God’s love flows through the world the way blood flows through our body The heart pumps it out, the blood feeds the body, the blood returns, and the cycle continues

To stop the flow of blood is to endanger the life of the body, this is also true of love

Abiding in love has one other component:

Our trust, our faith that love also surrounds us, supports us, encourages us, challenges us to share love

Now to love:

We often confuse God’s love with the warm and fuzzy feelings we imagine love is all about in a perfect world (and “perfect” is here a relative term)

Love does not mean painless, unbroken, no sorrow, no loss, no hurts

If Jesus abided in God’s love, then the cross should warn us against expecting a pain-free, sorrow-free, unbroken world when we abide in Jesus’ love

Jesus himself told us how to abide in love: “If you keep my commandments”

This is clue enough to know how difficult abiding in Jesus’ love can be

These days I am drawn to struggling with this abiding in love, because of how difficult some people make it for me to love them

All Lent I tried to engage people in conversation about issues, “hot topics” that divide us, our nation, our world.

Learning to see, and respect, the humanity in the person I so radically disagree with is not easy (and, sometimes, not possible), but God's abiding love does not excuse me from the exercise of trying.

No one is outside the love of God. Who am I to refuse to share it?

But sharing love does not mean accepting words or behaviors I find offense, even contrary to God's love. In those moments I am to speak up and act out, but my actions in that moment need to be loving, seeing the humanity in the other, leaving a door open for reconciliation. My actions must always be done with the awareness that I may be wrong, done with humility.

Whatever side of the political/social divide you find yourself on, if you are not trying to see the humanity of those on the "other side", then you are probably not abiding in love. You must be careful not ostracize, in your words or actions those who see the world differently from yourself.

All that we do, must be done in love.

I do not want to leave the impression that we need to quietly sit back and try not to make waves. There are large numbers of people in our country who fear for their lives, because they differ from "the norm".

Dr. King wrote to white clergy from the Birmingham jail eloquently, firmly, with determination, but never condescendingly. It was, for all intents and

purposes, a love letter, in which he informed his colleagues that actions for change, even if it caused civil unrest, must and will happen.

In the violence of words and deeds in our time we too are being challenged to speak up and act out.

- Rainbow doors and banners are one way of doing this.
- Tell the world, in word and deed, that "Black lives matter".
- As you interact with women, make sure your actions support #metoo

This tells you clearly what side of the divide I am on. And I am trying to better see those on the other side of the divide, so that I might love them, as Jesus has commanded.

Now you see how difficult abiding in Jesus' love can be.

I believe it is the only way to overcome the divide in our world; a divide that will destroy us if we do not overcome it.

John wrote: "This is the victory that conquers the world, our faith."

And it is by faith that we are able to "abide in Jesus' love."

May God's love surround us, giving us the strength, patience, and courage we need to abide in Jesus' love. Amen.