



# *Abide*

WITH ME

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Brookside Community Church  
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*We are truly at home in the places we are fully loved, where we are fully animated by love.*

*The Resurrection frees us to be at home in God's love. In God's love we discover who we truly are!*

## **John 15:1-8**

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. 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.*

## **Making a Home Together**

If you are like me, when the end of the day comes, you can't wait to put the world behind you and go home. At home, I can rest and escape from the crazy chaos of the world. But when we "come home" in the sense that Jesus calls us to, it is not an escape from the world; rather, it is a call to radically engage with it.

I know that homes are not always safe places—but we all know they are supposed to be. Homes, when they are really homes, are special places. They are supposed to be the places of our hopes and dreams. They are places of safety and rest. They are places where we can be vulnerable, where we can discover who we truly are when we are fully ourselves. As the saying goes, "home is where the heart is." We are truly at home in the place where we are fully loved, where we are fully animated by love.

When two people decide to make a home together, it is an invitation to an even deeper level of intimacy. This kind of intimacy has mutual risks. Your safety is now tied up with their safety, your dreams for the future are now tied in with theirs. Your lives begin to take shape together. Your dreams for the future take shape together. When someone says, "Let us build a home together" it is an invitation to dream and mutually discover who you are in the shape of your love for each other. You say to yourself, "This is who we are. This place is where we can be fully ourselves. This is us!"

When Jesus says, "Abide in me," he is inviting us to reshape our lives together, to rethinking who we are and to shape our lives in relationship to who God is. Since Jesus shows us the love that we were created in, shaping our lives in relation to his is nothing more than an invitation to reshape our lives according to who we truly are. It is less like moving into a new home, and more like returning to the home where we always belonged. When Jesus says, "Abide with me," he is inviting us to come home to who we truly are, to be fully animated in God's love for the world.

## **Souls Suffused with the Love of God, Not Disembodied Souls**

For many people, when Jesus says "Abide with me," they imagine leaving earth and escaping to an immaterial paradise. The material world is bad. The body is bad. When we die, we leave our bodies behind and enter into a disembodied immortality. This notion of disembodied souls, however, drives us away and puts us in opposition to world. It creates an attitude of evasion and withdrawal, rather than calling us to the kind of radical love for the world that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus bear witness to.

As many of you know, I have a deep spiritual connection with the writings of Wendell Berry. Hear what he says about the notion of disembodied souls.

*O saints, if I am eligible for this prayer, though less than worthy of this dear desire, and if your prayers have influence in Heaven, let my place there be lower than your own. I know how you longed, here where you lived as exiles, for the presence of the essential Being and Maker and Knower of all things. But because of my unruliness, or some erring virtue in me never rightly schooled, some error clear and dear, my life has not taught me your desire for flight: dismattered, pure, and free. I long instead for the Heaven of creatures, of seasons, of day and night. Heaven enough for me would be this world as I know it, but redeemed of our abuse of it and one another. It would be the Heaven of knowing again. There is no marrying in Heaven, and I submit; even so, I would like to know my wife again, both of us young again, and I remembering always how I loved her when she was old. I would like to know my children again, all my family, all my dear ones, to see, to hear, to hold, more carefully than before, to study them lingeringly as one studies old verses, committing them to heart forever. I would like again to know my friends, my old companions, men and women, horses and dogs, in all the ages of our lives, here in this place that I have watched over all my life in all its moods and seasons, never enough. I will be leaving how many beauties overlooked? A painful Heaven this would be, for I would know by it how far I have fallen short. I have not paid enough attention, I have not been grateful enough. And yet this pain would be the measure of my love. In eternity's once and now, pain would place me surely in the Heaven of my earthly love.<sup>1</sup>*

It is hard to get out of the habit of thinking about *heaven* as a place out of this world. The teachings of Jesus, however, tell us something important about heaven, if that is indeed where Jesus *abides*. If heaven is out of this world, it not because heaven is immaterial. It is because the kinds of relationships that are operative in our time and place are still too much governed by violation and wounding, rather than peace, healing, and restoration.<sup>2</sup> If we hear the resurrected Jesus say to us, “Abide with me,” he is not drawing us out of the world. He is inviting us to be animated by love in the same way that he was. To practice the resurrection is to be at home in the world the way Jesus was, fully animated by the love of God.

From this perspective, as Norman Wirzba puts it, “the ultimate goal of the whole of creation is for every creature to be so suffused and empowered by Jesus’ love that its life is an unending witness to the ways of peace and joy. When we seek to escape the world, there is no commitment to it. It can become a place of fear or indifference, but it cannot be the place where we encounter the sacred manifestation of the love of God all around us. Coming home to God is not about escaping the world, it is about being at home in the love of God so that we see who we are, that we are able to dream with God about who we can become together.

### **Abiding with Jesus**

The Resurrection, see, is about a change in perspective. It is about us learning to see the world as the creative expression of the love of God. Rather being shaped by fear and death, the Resurrection frees us to live animated by the power of the spirit of life.

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<sup>1</sup> Wendell Berry, “Wendell Berry, “Sabbaths VI, 2006,” in *This Day: Sabbath Poems Collected and New 1979–2013* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2013), pp. 292–93. Quoted in Norman Wirzba, *Way of Love: Recovering the Heart of Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2017), pp. 208-209.

<sup>2</sup> See Wirzba, *Way of Love*, p. 209.

When Jesus says, “Abide in me,” he is not inviting us to escape the world, but to reshape our lives together with him, to rethinking who we are and the shape of our lives in relationship to who God is. Since Jesus shows us the love that we were created in, shaping our lives in relation to his is nothing more than an invitation to reshape our lives according to who we truly are. It is less like moving into a new home, and more like returning to the home where we always belonged. When Jesus says, “Abide with me,” he is inviting us to come home.