

I am sending you the message that I had prepared for our first online service. Unfortunately we were not able to do that this week. We hope to be up and running next week. This message is a little longer than the ones I have been sending as it was intended for a worship service.

Abiding in Christ. St. Davids-Queenston United Church, May 24, 2020

### Invitation to Worship

Divine weaver, take the fragmented threads of our lives and work wonders for the needs of the world. When weary with concern, wondering at the worlds unravelling, weave us back to the centre. Shelter us in the cleft of the rock, shepherd us by the still waters. Great weaver of life, spinner of life's yarns, our measured time is in your hands. Take the patchwork pieces of our lives; enfold them in your sweet comfort. For in you we live and move and find our being. In you is comfort and joy for evermore.

Scripture: John 15:1-17

"I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn't bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken. "Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. "I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples. "I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done—kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in his love. "I've told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. You are my friends when you do the things I command you. I'm no longer calling you servants because servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I've named you friends

because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father. "You didn't choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won't spoil. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the Father in relation to me, he gives you. "But remember the root command: Love one another.

## Message

"Live in me. Make your home in me", reads the Message paraphrase of today's scripture. Some older versions use the more traditional and might I say, poetic language, "Abide in me". The passage goes on to remind us that if we do abide in Christ, all things we ask will be given to us. Well that sounds pretty simple does it not?

What does it mean to abide in Christ?

I can't remember any moment when Jesus said to his disciples, "In order to abide in me, you must believe the following five things about me".

What he said was, "Follow me".

He did not say what to think about him or even what to believe about him.

All that is required is to follow, to do what he did in the world, to live in the world as he lived. Oh yes, and to love one another. Ah, there's the sticking point.

So, Christianity is not a set of beliefs, principles or propositions. It is not beliefs about Jesus, it is a willingness to follow Jesus.

We make a mistake if we think it is some sort of mystery.

He just asks us to follow him.

Faith in Jesus is not, first of all, a matter of having *felt* something or having some sort of religious experience.

It's a simple willingness to stumble along behind Jesus.

We don't even have to achieve perfection. We have the example of the disciples to assure us of that. How many times did they appear to not understand? Do you remember the night in the garden where Jesus went to pray? "Could you not watch with me for one hour", he asked the sleepy disciples.

There is, of course, that one ultimate requirement, "love one another".

I venture to say that those who have gathered in this place for many years have done their best to be followers of Jesus, not that we are perfect, but that we are continuing to achieve the goal while stumbling on. We are indeed abiding in Christ and Christ abides in us. I think we can also affirm that God's loving presence was here before the universe began and will remain long after it ceases to be. Seeing

ourselves as part of a larger picture offers groundedness and hope. It can help us maintain a sense of hopefulness about God's loving presence in our lives, even when circumstances threaten to dim our hope.

That being said, we live now in a very different time, a time, the likes of which none of us have ever experienced. We live in uncertain times. If we are honest with ourselves we live in a time in which we struggle to hang on to that promised hope. There is so much sickness and death. There is the devastation of the economic impact and loss of jobs. It causes fear among us.

All of the usual connections that have made up our lives are no longer possible. We have innovated to a virtual world and made our connections that way, and that's great, but let's face it, something is missing.

And oh, how we long for this to be over. But again, we know that it's going to be a long haul and we must, as best we can, be patient.

We want things to return to *normal*, but again we strongly suspect that things will never be *normal* again.

We want our world back, but again we are aware that we are likely to be living in a new world, a new reality.

But, it's not all doom and gloom. This is what I'm finding in glimpses and flashes. We are all learning the value of love and relationship. We are learning how important is human connection. We are learning that life is made up of more than the big moments of life: that we can live without those momentous achievements for which we have struggled.

Given time to reflect, we are finding that life is a collection of a million, billion moments, tiny little moments and choices, like a handful of luminous glowing pearls. It takes so much time and so much work, yet therein is the beauty of a life. Normal, daily life, trickling by in our houses and apartments, at our dinner tables, in our phone calls and emails, our dreams and our prayers. This pedestrian life is the most precious of things.

There is nothing more sacred and profound than each and every day. I choose to believe that there may be a thousand profound moments in each new day even now, even in the midst of this pandemic; daily, tiny moments of courage and forgiveness and hope that we can grab on to and extend to one another. Perhaps we don't always see it in the business of *normal* life, but there they are now, in every hour, every conversation, every meal.

This pause in our life, this slowing down, opens our eyes to a new dimension.

Hear these words from *Lightening the Load* by Francis Dorff.

*The thing we have to do is notice  
that we've loaded down the camel  
with so much baggage  
we'll never get through the dessert alive.  
Something has to go.  
Then we can begin to dump  
The thousand things  
we've brought along  
until even the camel has to go  
and we're walking barefoot  
on the dessert sand.*

*There's no telling what will happen then.  
But I've heard that someone,  
Walking in this way,  
has seen a burning bush. (Francis Dorff, O. Praem,)*

*We abide in Christ and Christ in us. We are loved and we love.  
The God of the universe dwells within us. We have been given today. This is our  
hope.*

I heard this hymn last Sunday. I looked it up on the internet and it seems to have a variety of sources. The words are very fitting for our time.

*You shall cross the barren desert, but you shall not die of thirst.  
You shall wonder far in safety, though you do not know the way.  
You shall speak your words in foreign lands and all will understand.  
You shall see the face of God and live.*

*Be not afraid, I go before you always. Come follow me and I will give you rest.*

*If you pass through raging waters, in the sea you shall not drown.  
If you walk amid the burning flames, you shall not be harmed.  
If you stand before the power of hell and death is at your side,  
know that I am with you through it all.*

*Blessed are your poor, for the kingdom shall be theirs.  
Blessed are you that weep and mourn for one day you shall laugh.  
And if wicked tongues insult and hate you, all because of me,*

*blessed, blessed are you.*

*Be not afraid, I go before you always. Come follow me and I will give you rest.*

*And the people said.....*

*Will you pray with me?*

*Loving God, your desire is for our wholeness and well-being. We hold in tenderness and prayer the collective suffering of our world at this time. We grieve precious lives lost and vulnerable lives threatened. We ache for ourselves and our neighbours standing before an uncertain future. We pray: may love, not fear go viral. Inspire our leaders to discern and choose wisely, aligned with the common good. Regal to us new and creative ways to come together in spirit and solidarity. Call us to profound trust in your faithful presence.*

*And now we pray together, Our Father.....*

From Lisa, here is lovely choral version of 'You Raise Me Up'...

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaXjYq\\_SmaM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaXjYq_SmaM)