

"VOID IF DETACHED"
St. John 15:1-14

Text: "I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." St. John 15:5

Often when we buy tickets they will have a stub. And on the ticket will be printed the words, "void if detached." That means simply that apart from the stub, the ticket is of no value. Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." As Christians, our lives are inseparably connected to Jesus. Apart from him we can do nothing. We are void if detached.

For almost two thousand years groups of Christians have gathered together to do what we will do this morning as we celebrate Holy Communion. Jesus said about this supper, "Do this in remembrance of me." And why is it that for those two thousand years Christians have done this? For the simple reason that apart from him we can do nothing--we are void if detached.

If I took a picture out of my wallet, held it up for all to see, and said, "These are my children," you would understand what I meant. Of course, the picture would not really be my children--it would be only paper with certain chemicals on it. Yet, nevertheless, when I said, "these are my children," you would understand what I meant. In the same sense of the word, when Jesus took bread and broke it and said to his disciples, "This is my body, broken for you," they knew what he meant. When he took the cup of wine and said, "This is my blood, shed for you," they knew what he meant. In the days and years that were to come, often they would gather together to share in this simple meal of bread and wine. They would speak of it as his broken body and his shed blood and they would remember him. They knew that apart from him they could do nothing--they were void if detached.

As we come to that table this morning, let us remind ourselves that first of all it is inescapably personal. Nobody can eat my piece of bread for me. Nobody can sip my cup of wine for me. It is something I have to do for myself. Right here at this table I have to get personally involved with Jesus or else I have to put my bread down uneaten and my cup down untouched. In a few minutes you will hold the bread and the wine in your hand and in a very real sense Jesus will be saying to you, "Do you really mean business with me?" That's a fair question this morning: do you really mean business with Jesus?

But that brings us to the second thing about which we need to remind ourselves this morning. You see, not only is the Lord's Supper very personal--something each of us must do for ourselves--but it also reminds us that with Jesus there is no half-way, no middle ground. On the one hand he says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what he will, and it shall be done unto you." On the other hand he says, "if a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned." So, when the bread and wine are passed to you, remember there is no middle ground with Jesus. As he once put it, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad." (Matthew 12:30)

Are you "gathering" with Jesus this morning? To gather means to be active--it is an action word. Let me illustrate. Suppose I am "for" my particular football team. But suppose I never try out for the team, never make a practice session. Suppose further, I never root in the cheering section or even go to the games. Am I really "for" my team? Well, not in any way that counts. You see, there is a difference

between a spectator and a fan. A spectator in no way gets involved. Not so the fan. The word "fan" is an abbreviation of the word "fanatic". And a fanatic is one who is tremendously involved. He is vitally and acutely concerned with what is happening and it matters desperately to him how the game is going.

Now, Christianity is not a spectator sport! Jesus says that you are either a fanatic who is vitally and acutely involved on a personal level with me or you are against me. With Jesus there is no middle ground. As you take the bread and wine ask yourself if you are a fanatic--are you fanatic about witnessing? Are you a fanatic about praying and reading your Bible? Are you a fanatic about helping others? Are you a fanatic about tithing? Are you a fanatic about being morally up-right? "He that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad." No, there is no middle ground.

There is a third thing we need to remind ourselves of this morning. It is this: death. Yes, death. Death because this supper reminds us that Jesus gave his life for us. This supper is about his body and blood broken and shed for us. He told us to keep this supper to show forth his death until he comes again. Do you remember the closing verse of our scripture for this morning? "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Jesus did that for you and me.

But do you know what really bothers me? Jesus said, "This I command you, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you." So this table speaks to us not only of his death but our death. Jesus expects us to invest ourselves in others. He expects us to lose our lives in order that we might truly find them. So we are reminded this morning that Jesus wants us to die a little every day--to die in the sense that we invest something of self in others.

Remember the story of the Good Samaritan? When he found the man beaten, robbed, stripped of his very clothing, he could have done a number of things. He could have organized a clothing drive to cover the man's nakedness. He could have called for a transportation committee to move the man. He could have asked for a food committee to provide hot soup. He could have started a fund-raising campaign to pay for hospital expenses. Instead, out of the abundance of his love and concern he invested himself in the life of another. Yes, "this I command you, that ye love one another even as I have loved you."

Jesus said, "without me ye can do nothing." That is, we are void if detached. To abide in Jesus means to be personally involved, it means to be a fanatic in commitment for there is no middle ground, and it means to be willing to die for self in order that we might live for others.

On the cross Jesus really meant business when he let his body be broken and his blood shed. As we come to the table we need to ask ourselves if we really mean business, too.