

Sermon for Sunday, November 1, 1981 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO 63105

"JESUS HAS NO MASTER KEY"  
St. John 15:111

Text: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing." St. John 15:5

During this past week, many of us have participated in the lay renewal at Central. Those of you who did not get to participate really missed a wonderful experience! Many lives were touched, many had their hearts changed, and many came into a new relationship to Jesus Christ. But what does one do after that happens? How does one maintain that close relationship to Jesus when his or her heart has been touched? I propose to deal with that question and that is why I have chosen our particular scripture for this morning. I wish we had time to deal with the entire passage today, but time limits us to just our text printed in the bulletin. I hope you will either keep your Bibles open to that verse or keep your bulletin open before you.

The first thing Jesus tells us is that in order to bear fruit, in order to live a successful and productive spiritual life, we must act--we must do something. What is this action that is required of us who would be Christians? Jesus says we must abide. Now, the Greek word for "abide" (meno) has two forces, or two parts to its meaning. First, it means to stay put, to stand in place. In that sense it has a passive meaning of enduring. To endure may be hard to do. Sometimes life doesn't seem to be going very well and we give in to the temptations of life, we surrender to the pressures to life. But Jesus says we are to stand in place when things seem at their worst. For example, in I Corinthians 10:13 we read, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." So here we are introduced to the power of endurance that enables us to overcome even the worst assault of temptation. Again in II Timothy 2:12 we read, "If we endure, we shall also reign with him." That's exciting, isn't it? If we endure, we shall reign with our Savior! Jesus himself once put it this way when he was discussing how those who follow him will be persecuted, "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death, and you will be hated...and most men's love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 24:9-14. See also Matthew 10:22 and Mark 13:13) Yes, to abide in Him means to endure, to stand in place. Recently we have been observing the 200th anniversary of the battle of Yorktown, which resulted in the defeat of the British and was really the final, decisive battle in the Revolutionary War. One of the leaders in that battle was an American general named Joseph Reed. His fellow officer, Benedict Arnold, had already grown discouraged over the prospects of winning the war against England and had sold out to the enemy. General Reed was also approached by the British and was offered a very large bribe to defect. But General Reed made this answer, "I am not worth purchasing; but, such as I am, the King of Great Britain is not rich enough to buy me." Here was a man who, in the face of seeming defeat and in the very worst of circumstances, endured. And because he did, he had a share in winning the independence you and I enjoy today. So, to abide means to stand firm, to keep your place, to stand by that to which you have committed yourself.

But there is another force to the Greek word for "abide" for it also means to persist. To endure, in one sense of the word, is a passive term. But to persist has a more positive force, an aggressive force, for it is an active word that implies action. Do you remember how St. Paul expressed it? Speaking of the Christian faith he wrote, "I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do...I press on toward the goal..."(Phil. 3:13) Here is that quality of persistence that we must have if we are to attain our goal of serving Christ.

Does that make sense to you? If we are to be the men and women God calls us to be, we must persist. We keep on praying, we keep on studying the word, we keep on singing, we keep on worshipping, we keep on being obedient to the commands of God. And that may not be easy to do! But Jesus says we are to "abide". As a matter of fact, in the eleven verses we read this morning Jesus uses the word "abide" ten times. That's pretty emphatic, don't you think?

Well, are you doing that? Are you abiding in the sense that you are standing in place, that you are enduring? Are you abiding in the sense that you are actively pursuing, that you are persistently doing those things that help you become God's man or God's woman?

So the first thing Jesus tells us is what to do--we are to abide. The second thing he tells us is what we are to stand for. He says, "abide in me." Who is this Jesus in whom we are asked to abide and for whom we are asked to stand? Over in Psalm 80 we find the Psalmist writing: "Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt; thou didst drive out the nations and plant it. Thou didst clear the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land." (Psalm 80:8,9) So one of the very ancient symbols of Israel was a vine. Thus Jeremiah could speak for God and say to Israel, "Yet I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed." (Jer. 2:21) So the vine was a recognized symbol of God's chosen people. As a matter of fact, when the Jews rebelled against their rulers under the Maccabeans and briefly gained their independence, the Maccabean coinage represented Israel by a vine. Now, it is in that context that Jesus says, "I am the vine." That is, I am the true Israel.

What do you stand for today? You see, many of us are in some Egyptian bondage. Some of us are in bondage to money. Wealth has become our God and we are in bondage to the things we possess. Some are in bondage to sex and much of what we read and much of what we see in movies and on television are simply indications of the bondage of our souls. Some of us are in bondage to success where the goals of our lives is to achieve fame and to climb to the top of some Egyptian ladder of achievement. Some of us are in bondage to self-gratification where the focus of our existence is self-indulgence and putting ourselves at the center of the world.

Are you in some spiritual captivity this morning? Is there anything in your life that is more important to you than Jesus Christ? When God brought the Hebrews out of Egyptian bondage, the Bible speaks of it as a vine planted. If you want to be free of your bondage this morning, Jesus says, "I am the vine." Are you in bondage to loneliness? Jesus says, "I am the vine." Are you in bondage to some bitter feeling, some hatred? Jesus says, "I am the vine." Are you in bondage to self-pity, to a sense of inadequacy, to a poor self-image? Jesus says, "I am the vine."

Yes, what do we stand for this morning? If we are in some spiritual bondage, Jesus wants to set us free. He says, "I am the vine". Life will have meaning and purpose, life will have a sense of direction that brings fulfillment and happiness when we abide in Him. To what and to whom are we looking this morning to bring us joy? In verse eleven of our Scripture this morning Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you." In the final analysis, real joy will be found when we abide in Him.

This morning we are thinking together about how to maintain our faith, how to keep a vital and lively relationship to Jesus. We have said that first we must abide--we must stand in place and we must persist in the things of God. Second, we have said that we must abide in Jesus. To put the focus anywhere else is to court spiritual disaster. The third thing about our text that I would call to your attention is this: Jesus not only says we are to abide in him, but he is to abide in us. Now, why is that necessary? Jesus tells us quite plainly. He says, "for apart from me, you can do nothing." Isn't that true in our spiritual lives? We simply don't have the power to be the man or the woman God calls us to be. If we must rely simply on our own power, our own resources, we always fail. I know that is true in my own life. When I try on my own to be the person I think I ought to be, I always fail. I just don't have the spiritual power to be the person I want to be. Is that true in your life? On your own can you always say the right thing, do the right thing, act in the loving way, make the sacrificial act and be the person you would like to be? Well, neither can I and neither can the person sitting next to you!

That means quite simply that if I am going to be the person God calls me to be I must have a resource of spiritual power I don't have on my own. In our text Jesus says that without him we can do nothing. The Greek word translated "can do" is an interesting one. It comes from the verb dunamai from which we get the English words, "dynamo", "dynamic" and "dynamite". As far as I am able to tell, in the Gospels this word is primarily used to describe the power of God. But when Jesus, after his resurrection, is ready to leave his disciples for the last time, he tells them to stay in Jerusalem until they are clothed with power (dunamis) from on high. (Luke 24:49) Of course, he is talking about the coming of the Holy Spirit. Again, in Acts 1:8, Jesus says to his disciples, "But you shall receive power(dunamis) when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..."

So when Jesus says that without him we can do nothing, he is referring to the spiritual power of the Holy Spirit within the heart of the believer. You see, without that inner spiritual power, without that indwelling of the Holy Spirit that equips us with the very power of God himself, we cannot be the person God calls us to be.

Does that make sense to you? On our own, we can't be a spiritual success. Most of us have tried it and we know it doesn't work. So Jesus says to us, "Without me you can do nothing." That is, without the power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts we cannot bear fruit for God.

We had a great lay renewal last week. Many lives were touched and many came into a new relationship with Jesus Christ. But what will we be like a month from now, a year from now or even five years from now? Will we be growing and maturing in the Lord? Will we be then the kind of persons we intend to be this morning? If we are, then we must abide--we must stand in place when

things are at their worst and we must persist in doing the things of God. Then, we must fix our eyes on Jesus for he says to abide in him. But above all, we must open our hearts and our lives to let him abide in us. We need his power, his strength, his help to be the people we want to be and the people he wants us to be.

That brings me to the final thing I want to say this morning. If we want the power of God, we must open our hearts to his Spirit. Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him..." (Revelation 3:20). Have you done that? Have you opened your heart to the power of Jesus to let him control your life? None of us will ever be his man or his woman until we do because we don't have the power to abide in him without his help.

But that's the catch, you see. He knocks but we must open the door. Holman Hunt has a fascinating painting of Jesus. He stands at a door holding a lantern in his hand, knocking. As one studies the picture, he becomes aware that there is something unusual about the door for it has no handle on the outside. No, it can only be opened from the inside and there stands Jesus knocking. Do you see? Jesus has no master key to your heart. He cannot open the door. The handle is on your side and you must open it. Have you done that? Have you invited him into your heart to take control of your life and to give you spiritual power to bear fruit for God? No, Jesus has no master key to your heart. Only you can open the door.