

Now lets...

Hear the Word is the Lord from Mark 3:13-15, John 15:1-11
This is the Word of the Lord; Thanks be to God.

So, you will notice that I have 2 plants up here sitting on the pulpit... at first glance, they look the same — both green, both healthy, both sitting in their pots.

But let me show you something. [lift the cut-off one] This one is no longer connected to its roots. It's been cut off.

Right now it still looks alive, but it has no source of life. And unless grafted back in It's only a matter of time before the leaves droop and the plant withers.

This is exactly the picture That Jesus gives us in John 15. He says: 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.'

You see, we can look alive. We can look planted, even religious. But if we're not abiding in Christ, If we are trying to do it all on our own, we will inevitably wither like this plant is destined to do... On the other hand, when we remain rooted in Him — drawing life and nourishment from His love — we flourish and bear fruit that lasts.

Many of us can be busy for Jesus but not often with Jesus...

But what if the first goal of apprenticeship Isn't doing, but being?

You see the crucial problem for us as we try to follow Jesus today Is our struggle against time... It always has been. When asked what was needed for Spiritual Health Dallas Willard replied "You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life. Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day"

One of the greatest dangers for us is not open rebellion against God, but distraction. We get so hurried, so busy, that our souls slowly dry out without us noticing. A branch doesn't have to make a loud declaration to cut itself off from the vine. It just needs to be removed from the source — and soon, without nourishment, Like this plant, it withers.

In the same way, when our lives are filled with constant motion and noise, we can look alive on the outside but be spiritually withering on the inside.

Does anyone feel that way?

Busyness is not the same as fruitfulness. We can mistake activity for life, but Jesus says apart from Him, we can do nothing. The danger of distraction is that we can fill our calendars, our minds, and even our hearts with so much that there's no room left for abiding.

I know how easy it is to let the days get crowded. The calendar fills up, the phone buzzes, and before we know it, another week has gone by without us really stopping to abide in Christ. We come home from vacation and leisure time away and confess we need a vacation from our vacation... We don't feel rested... I need this reminder too...

The reality is sometimes we are looking for distractions, for busyness... We don't want to slow down... We're unwilling to face the Lord... Afraid of how we don't measure up, or that his grace isn't enough for us, or afraid of what we will have to give up to be with him... Or what inner demons we will have to face

And for some of us we may think, "It's not that big of a deal pastor Jay... You're over playing this being with Jesus thing. My faith life is fine... The Sunday service, some ministry programs, and my daily devotional are enough for me"

But we read in the gospels that Jesus, God himself, was regularly stepping away from his disciples and going to spend time alone, set aside to be with the Father... If Jesus needs time with God to be with him, how much more do we...

There are many verses in the Bible that speak to how critical being with God really is... It's probably most clearly seen in our verse for today Jesus tells the disciples plainly... "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, **showing yourselves to be my disciples.**"

Jesus makes clear, we can't be disciples or bear fruit unless we abide in him... The foundation of true apprenticeship is not doing... But **being with God.**

We are not called to try to manufacture life and fruits to be filled with and reflect God's love on our own, but instead we are called to stay rooted in the source of true life. He will fill us with his life and love and make us fruitful...

The disciples understood that the first part of apprenticeship was being with Jesus they had experienced it first hand... And Mark describes this in his Gospel where he says, "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve **that they might be with him...**"

The purpose of calling the 12 disciples was that they might be with him... To be with Jesus... To live in full-time apprenticeship to Jesus...

This need to be with him is echoed throughout the bible... It is seen clearly in Psalm 27 where the psalmist says, "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple."

True discipleship, apprenticeship, is not self-improvement... But union with Christ... Our first calling is not productivity, but proximity... Being close to him...

But there is a key distinctive especially for us reformed folks who like knowledge. It's not just knowing more about Jesus, it's knowing him, personally... So often we go wrong in apprenticeship when we turn it into knowing facts about Jesus or serving for him... It becomes a list of to dos... And those things are good and very important. But discipleship, true apprenticeship, is not just learning information about Jesus, it's not just serving him, it's actually getting to know him. It's the difference between Martha making food for Jesus and Mary sitting at his feet and spending time with him attentively listening to him... Building relationship...

But here's the thing: the reason Mary could sit at Jesus' feet is because she knew He loved her. We will never slow down to abide unless we believe — deep in our bones — that Jesus actually wants to be with us. But God makes clear in Scripture that he so loved the world... that he so loves you... That he gave his one and only Son..

As 1 Cor. 13 makes clear our measure of success in apprenticeship is love. And as 1 John 4:19 tells us "We love because he first loved us." Our Love is the measure of apprenticeship... But His Love is the source of our Love...

You see, our world values us based on our production... But God values us because we are his children made in his image... He wants to spend time with us because of his great love for us... And this worldly value based on production can lead us into a life of busyness and it can carry us away... And the idea of being with Jesus through the Christian Disciplines, the habits we engage in to form us into Christ's likeness, like prayer, and bible reading, and serving, can seem like another list of to dos in an already overwhelmingly busy life... We just don't have the time... But that is exactly when we need him most...

Though we may feel like we don't have time if we're honest, it's not always a matter of time — it's a matter of where our time goes. As Comer says, we already abide in something. We somehow find time to scroll on our phones, to watch another episode, to check our emails one more time, to endlessly tidy an immaculate house, to continually replay conversations we've had

to run one more errand... to chat about everything but faith... I know this in my own life too — it's so easy to fill the little spaces of the day and any and all down time we have with noise and distraction.

And yet, Jesus reminds us, 'Apart from Me, you can do nothing.' But he isn't trying to guilt us, He's trying to set us free. He's offering us something far better than distraction: He offers life, rest, joy, and fruit that lasts an experience of God's true love for you that will fill you and overflow from you...

The question isn't just, 'Do I have time?' but, 'Am I willing to make space to remain in Him, the true Vine?'"

Now, before we turn this into another project, here's the gospel: we only make our home in Jesus because He has already made His home in us. He is Emmanuel, God with us. The cross secured our union. The Spirit makes His presence real. Abiding isn't climbing to God — it's living into the reality that He has already come down to us. The branch doesn't hold on with white knuckles; it rests in the vine that already holds it. That's grace.

Jesus has given us many disciplines... Not just things to do like bible reading, prayer, and service... But also disciplines to slow us down. Disciplines like silence, solitude, fasting, simplicity, sabbath...

Each of these disciplines are ways to help us reprioritize our life. Ways to slow us down, and give us space. So that we have room in our hectic life to abide in **Him**. Rather than all the other things that we abide in...It's an invitation to true rest and leisure not the counterfeit distractions we choose for momentary pleasure that fail to deliver true rest...

I don't know about you, but this verse and other like it have kind of mystified me for the longest time... I wondered, "What does it really mean to remain in him?" To abide in him? To have union with Christ? I pictured monks in some monastery in the middle of nowhere praying all day... I had no idea what that meant for me. Today... With 5 kids... And a busy job...

But over time, With experience and learning, I began to get a picture of abiding... And I have found Comer's book Practicing the way to describe abiding in Christ better than any one else I have read.

This is what he says: "the first and most important goal of apprenticeship is to be with Jesus..." And then he describes apprenticeship this way, "To spend every waking moment aware of his presence and attentive to his voice. To cultivate a with-ness to Jesus as the baseline of your entire life..."

The word abide is not one we use in everyday language. It's another church word...But abide just means "to dwell", or stay, Or remain, as its translated in our NIV, Or to make your home in... And that's one that struck me... To abide or remain, is to make your home in...

And So when Jesus says "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. He is saying "make your home in me, as I also make my home in you"

So what does it look like to make our home in Christ?

A 16th century french cook named Brother Lawrence, who worked in a monastery described it as practicing the presence of God... maintaining a humble, loving, and constant conversation with God throughout the day, even during mundane tasks, by keeping our mind focused on God's presence and bringing our wandering thoughts back to Him. It's a practice of habitual mindfulness where God is found not just in prayer, but also in the heart during everyday activities, leading to a sweet familiarity with God and a divine peace... Its a depth of Being With God, that even the chaos of the kitchen becomes leisurely and restful...

Comer describes it similarly he says, it's about learning to always be in two places at once... Making your morning coffee and being present to Jesus. Driving in to work and being present to Jesus. Riding the bus to school and being present to Jesus. Sitting in Math Class and being present to Jesus. Playing tag on the school yard and being present to Jesus. Dealing with a broken down tractor or running a work meeting and being present to Jesus. Making dinner and being present to Jesus. Running the kids to sports and being present to Jesus. Getting the kids down for bed and being present to Jesus...

And so abiding in Christ, practicing the presence of God, is not just making intentional time of silence and solitude, sabbath, simplicity and fasting in order to pray, read the bible And serve others, but it is also a state of awareness a place we return to in our minds an ongoing communion with God growing in an awareness of his love for us that is the source from which we live out love to others... Jesus becomes the place where our mind returns when it has a moment... He becomes our Home... Rather than the myriad of todos, or sports, or the weather, or wherever our minds goes throughout the day... Instead training our mind, over time, to go to God...

This can seem so foreign to us... And this is certainly not naturally where our minds go...Where does your mind go when you have a moment? While you're in traffic? or making dinner? While in the tractor or at the office or in the classroom?

And so, if we truly want to be Jesus' apprentices and begin to experience the kingdom of God here and now we must slowly develop the habits to Retrain and Rewire our brains over time... Paul describes it as a daily dying and rising... But this takes lots of practice. And we will repeatedly fail... Like anything we train ourselves to do... Its a slow process...

But we don't have to practice this perfectly to begin to experience the fruit of God... God is gracious and will fill you abundantly as you begin to fall in step with the Spirit and be with him throughout your day. But on going practice will make it easier. And we will grow in the joy of the Lord as we spend more time with him...

Practice is essential...

If you want to play amazing grace on the violin, you don't just pick up a violin and try really hard to do it... You take lessons from a teacher... And you train... Every day...

Actually, I would say you first desire to learn the violin like my son Eli did... You hear the beauty and virtuosity of the violin played well and you become inspired, passionate... Then fueled by this inspiration you learn how to hold the bow and violin, and you practice how to move the bow properly, perpendicular to the strings, and how to change the angle of the bow. To play each different string. Then you must train to teach your fingers to find the notes on the fret board and memorize them. And then you must learn how to read music, and learn timing. And then finally learn the piece...

Similarly, If we want to abide in God and be filled with him, we must first take time and contemplate God. Look at him... Look at what he has done in the Bible. Stand awestruck at his incredible love and grace for us. And look at the virtuosic life that Jesus lived It's a beautiful symphony... Be inspired... And this inspiration will compel you to be with him...

Do not resign yourself to a mediocre life half heartedly attending church, But not seriously pursuing God. He can and will transform you Don't fear failure. Trust that he can and will change your life... And then practice... Keep directing your mind back to God... Engaging the disciplines that help us slow down and the ones that help us be in his presence through prayer and his Word... And slowly, over time, we can, as Paul says, "Set our minds on things above.."

This can sound weird or foreign to the church today... And that breaks my heart... Because this is the gateway to true life in God...

Now, we need to be careful to understand that the Gospel is not opposed to work... It's opposed to earning... We are called to respond... to grow in his likeness. But why we do it matters... Not to earn our salvation, but to receive and reflect the Love that has already been given to us.

And because Christ knows how easily we forget this — how quickly we drift, and try to live on our own strength — He gives us a way to not only hear this truth, but to taste it. The Lord's Supper is God's invitation to abide. Here Christ nourishes us with His very life, reminding us that we don't live the Christian life on our own. Just as the branch draws life from the vine, we draw life from Christ — and He gives Himself to us here.

This meal is not about what we offer to God, but about receiving what God offers to us: His presence, His forgiveness, His love, His life, and true rest and true leisure...

True rest.. True leisure... Is not distraction in the things that give us momentary pleasure but leave us yearning... it is true abiding rest in the Lord God almighty...In his word, in prayer, in his presence... In his grace and love despite our mistakes... The deep heart knowledge that we are loved regardless of what we accomplish...

So I encourage you, if you are thankful for your salvation and inspired by what you see in Jesus take time to learn about the disciplines. Engage the disciplines of subtraction, Silence and solitude, fasting, sabbath, simplicity. These will help you to carve out time in your day, to slow down, to set aside your phone, or whatever is distracting you in your life, and engage with God...

Psalm 139 makes clear that the presence of the Lord is always near to us... “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”

Abiding in the Lord, is growing more deeply into an awareness of this truth... Seeing his great love and pursuit...

My favorite is how Paul describes it as he prays in Ephesians 3 He says, “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge —that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

This is what Paul is getting at: A with-ness to God. Jesus dwelling in our hearts. making his home there... And this reveals God’s love to us that is beyond our understanding... that fills us to the measure of all the fullness of God...

Remember the two plants? One looks alive but is already withering, the other, rooted and flourishing.

Jesus doesn’t invite us to strain and pretend. He invites us to abide — to rest in Him, to draw from His life. And the good news is: He has already drawn near to us. He has already given Himself for us. He has already sent His Spirit to dwell in us. Our role is simply to remain in the love that first remained with us. AMEN