

REFLECTION
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John 15: 1-8

Jesus said to his disciples..... 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. ... My father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

It's that time of year again. There will be a swath of graduation speeches. My neighborhood in Annapolis is all a-twitter. The Naval Academy announced that it will have its commissioning ceremony at the Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium in person on May 28. And will have its first woman graduation speaker— Vice President Kamala Harris. I wonder what she will say.

I recently saw a collage posted—pictures of people who have influenced our society and culture in the past few years. Under each picture is a short quip, easily identified with each. Vice President Harris is included. The tagline on her picture is “Be the first, but not the last.” There are others. I wonder if you can guess.

“Be kind to the earth.” That’s environmental activist, Greta Thunberg.

“Be compassionate.” That’s the Dali Lama.

“Be brave.” Malala, the young Pakistani woman who received the Nobel Peace Prize.

“Be kind to others.” Fred Rogers.

“Be kind to yourself.” Robin Williams.

“Be a teacher.” Jill Biden.

“Be a revolution.” Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

“ Be a reader.” LeBar Burton of *Reading Rainbow*.

“Be the voice for change.” Nelson Mandela.

“Be a poet.” Amanda Gorman.

“Be yourself.” Trans pioneer, Christine Jorgensen.
 “Be good trouble.” John Lewis.
 “Be kind to animals” Jane Goodall.
 “Be humble.” Jimmy Carter.



When I graduated from Goucher in 1972 the keynote speaker was Coretta Scott King. She was probably the most sought after speaker in those years following the death of her husband—and a leader in the civil rights movement in her own right. I noticed that she was the keynote at Harvard in 1968—just a month after Dr. King’s assassination. There’s a video of her speech on the internet I plan to watch. I wonder which bit of wisdom and advice speaks to you. I don’t remember what Mrs. King said to my graduating class. But I do remember meeting Dr. Huston Smith in those years—the great professor and author of dozens of books on World Religions. Meeting him influenced my life. He was a guest lecturer and I was to be his campus guide for the day. I was awed not so much by what he said but by his manner with everyone he met. He had a quiet sort of smile that radiated a

profound joy from within. He received each person, and each question, with respect and seriousness. And he genuinely took delight in the dialogue. By the end of the day, I decided I wanted to know whatever it was that he knew—which meant that I would sign up for as many classes as I could to learn about the great religions of the world—hoping to discover what wisdom and truths they have in common. Along these lines, Dr. Smith wrote— *“Beware of the differences that blind us to the unity that binds us.”* I took his warning to heart. He said, “Everyone, worldwide, is looking for orientation, a direction, an anchor in life. I hope I give this to those I meet.” And, *“Religion reminds us that we are all in good hands.”* Perhaps this assurance of “being in good hands” is what I saw in his gracious and joyful manner.

In today’s Gospel we listen to Jesus as he gathered his disciples together and gave them his final teachings. In a sense it was their graduation ceremony following the three years he spent with them. Jesus is the keynote speaker at this Upper Room graduation. He summarized everything he had taught them. He told them what they must not forget. He reminded them of the essential truths they must remember. He warned them of the trials that were coming. He encouraged them to stay strong in the faith. He uses an illustration, a common, everyday picture so that they might remember. He uses the imagery of the vine and the vinedresser. He is the vine. God is the vinedresser. He tells them to stay connected. His words are guidance about the best way to live—the way that leads to fullness and health, and security. The way that leads to a fulfilling and productive life. *“Abide in me as I abide in you.”* Here are the words to remember and to live by as we shape our lives and as we face the inevitable struggles. *“Abide in me as I abide in you.”*

His message is not so much about aiming for random productivity as we live our lives, but about being empowered by authentic love— love that creates and restores, love that is sourced by God. Jesus’ message is less about “Go out there and seize the day!” as some

might say. Rather, he says “abide.” *To abide* means to be grounded, and nourished, and protected—in order to thrive. It’s not raw productivity that he advises as our life goal, but to be selective, to be carefully tended and cherished and loved into life.

“*Abide in me and I abide in you.*”

Jesus offers relationship, relationship, relationship. Abundant life comes through a relationship with the creator and redeemer and is experienced within. Thriving is the natural consequence of staying connected and being loved.

Someone made this observation: “You know how it is. Sometimes we lose touch with a particular person. We no longer know where he or she is, what she is doing, or what is happening in her life. One day we run into him or her. It’s a bit awkward. No one is sure what to say. There’s not much to talk about. There was no deep abiding presence, the connection is lost, and it seems as if what was has been thrown away. Other people we run into after five or ten years and the conversation immediately picks up where we left off those many years ago. Even though we were apart we never left each other. There was and remains a connection and a mutual *abiding*, that time, distance, and the circumstances of life cannot sever.” Abide and thrive.

Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons who lived in the second century is said to have heard John the Evangelist in his own lifetime. He is best-known for this quotation:

“The glory of God is the person fully alive.”

“*Abide in me as I abide in you*” This is what it says on the picture of Jesus we are given in the Gospel and by the early Church. “*Abide in me as I abide in you*” —and together our love and works will thrive and glorify God.

AMEN