

Sermon for Sunday, May 2, 2021 - "Branch Out in Love"

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Abide is such a beautiful word. To abide is to put down roots, settle in and feel at home. To abide with someone is to be there for them, day in and day out, for the long haul. Jesus abides with us. Jesus, the vine, is a grounding, nourishing home for us. Our connection to this home, this vine, allows us to branch out into the world in life-giving ways. It allows us to provide shelter and nourishment for others. This is such good news in this unsettling time.

Author Diana Butler Bass says the pandemic has profoundly *dislocated* us.¹ When I first started reading her article about this I thought, no! We've been *overly* located, in the same place for far too long. Most of us have spent way too much time stuck in our houses. Yet as she described all the ways we've been dislocated, that word started to help me make sense of what's happened to us.

Bass says we've experienced temporal dislocation - that is, we've lost our sense of time. Early in the pandemic we often had no idea what day it was. Whether your days were way too empty or far too full, everything was out of whack, our normal rhythms disrupted. One morning news show started a segment called, "What Day Is It". They'd play 70s style game show music and build up suspense around the question until they revealed, "Today is Tuesday."

Time still seems to be moving differently. It feels like the pandemic has lasted ten years, yet I can't believe it's May again. Last week I said to my husband, "Oh, that isn't until the end of April", about an event that was happening in two days. Apparently, this is called temporal dislocation. Knowing there's a name for it makes me feel a little more normal.

Bass says we've also experienced historical dislocation. She writes, "We've lost our sense of where we are in the larger story of both our own lives and our communal stories. History has been disrupted. Where are we? Where are we going? The growth of conspiracy theories, the intensity of social media, political and religious "deconstructions" - these are signs of a culture seeking a meaningful story to frame its lives because older stories have failed. That's historical dislocation."²

We've also experienced physical dislocation. Our bodies are meant to be with other bodies in physical space. They're meant to touch and smell and taste. It's unsettling to shop for a tomato when you can't feel it or even see it. It's disorienting to worship in the place where you watch TV, work and exercise, sleep, study, shop and socialize. In this virtual world, many of us have been doing things to help our bodies feel more grounded in physical space. We've made bread and gardened and taken on projects. Yet we've still been so disconnected from normal patterns of moving through space.

¹ "Religion After the Pandemic" by Diana Butler Bass. Blog post on her blog: "The Cottage", April 26, 2021.

https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/religion-after-pandemic?r=45vbf&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&utm_source=twitter

² Ibid.

Of course, we've also experienced profound relational dislocation. We've had to celebrate holidays and birthdays and milestones without our loved one's present. Yet we've also missed smiles from the checker at the grocery store and serendipitous conversations with acquaintances. We've spent hours staring at screens with a whole bunch of squares filled with faces whose voices are often muted.

We've been dislocated from our sense of time, history, place, and relationships.

Now that more of us have been vaccinated, now that more of us are moving out into the world, we're being unsettled again. A Good Shepherd member shared a funny email. It reads, "Please pray for us. We are planning to go to an indoor church service tomorrow morning. Oh, it's not the Covid that concerns us. Barb and I are fully vaccinated and the church follows strict protocols ... No, the challenge will be to get out of bed, dress respectfully and arrive at church before 8 am. I hope it's not too much of a shock to our systems."

At Good Shepherd most people don't need to arrive until 9:30, but still, our changing patterns right now are disrupting us and raising all sorts of new questions. Can we handle worship outside with bugs and noise and weather? Can we get through in-person meetings when everyone is distanced and masked? Do we still know how to make small talk? We face larger questions as well. How will the church be different post-pandemic? How can we better care for the earth, our shared home, and better care for one another? How can we love and serve as our nation grapples with historic and systemic racism, and when so many in the world don't have access to vaccines or safe places to live or enough food to eat?

Jesus says, "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. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." Life in our world right now is so unsettling and disorienting, yet we have been given a place to abide. We have been given a relationship with Jesus in which we can rest and breathe, put down roots and settle in. This life-giving relationship with Jesus provides so much grounding and nurture amid all the dislocation we've experienced.

Relationship with Jesus reshapes our sense of time. Jesus has entered human time and is present with us in it, working new life. This frees us to move in time differently. We can be present to all the drudgery, beauty, and pain of our days for Jesus abides with us there. In every moment we face, we are not alone. Relationship with Jesus also gives us a life-giving story in a time of historical dislocation. Human sin, suffering and death do not have the final word. God is at work to bring new life.

In relationship with Jesus, we are seen, known, and loved fully, completely, with no need for masks. We are nourished with life-giving words and with a tangible feast of love. We are given community. In Jesus, the vine, we are nourished, strengthened, and cleansed so that we can branch out into the world in life-giving ways. We are given what we need to bear fruit so that others can be fed and sheltered, so that our earth can flourish.

Beloved of God, Jesus is your abiding place. You are rooted and grounded in Jesus' love. Jesus abides with you. And you are a branch on Jesus' life-giving vine. Jesus is at work in you to bring life to others.

You can breathe in this good news.
You can branch out into this world in love.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.