

July 6, 2025

**The Gospel of John**  
**XVII. If You Abide in My Word**  
**John 8:1-36**

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*“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,”* says Jesus. *“If you abide in my word . . .”* “Abide” suggests two things. One, that we make our home in God’s Word often, even continually – move in and live there. Abide. And second that, in doing so, we begin to feel deeply at home in God’s Word. Or, perhaps we should say, that Word begins to dwell deeply in us – in the ways we begin to understand life, to look at others, to make sense of the things we see and experience daily.

That first sense of the word “abide,” that we make our home in God’s Word often – reading it frequently, faithfully, thoughtfully – reminded me of something I came across in one Christian’s account of coming to faith. In a chapter on learning to read the Bible, she talked of how, sure, one can just flip open the Bible now and then and maybe something will speak to you. But that what she had learned was that the Bible only really speaks to us when we are willing to engage with it regularly and intentionally – abide in it! And she went on to describe what this had made the Bible mean to her and for her in a most striking way:

*My relationship with the Bible is not a romance but a marriage, and one I am willing to work on in all the usual ways: by living with the text day in and day out, by listening to it and talking back to it, by making sure I know what is behind the words it speaks to me and being certain I have heard it properly, by refusing to distance myself from the parts of it I do not like or understand, by letting my love for it show up in the everyday acts of my life. The Bible is not an object for me; it is a partner, whose presence blesses me, challenges me, and affects everything I do.<sup>1</sup>*

To abide in God’s Word is to enter into it frequently, faithfully, and thoughtfully – like a marriage.

But it is that second meaning of the word “abide” that really speaks to me, and I hope also to you – that to abide in the Bible means that we learn to make our home in that Word – a home for our heart as well as for our head in what God speaks to us. Such that the Word begins to make its home in us – and begins to shape the ways we think and feel and respond to the challenges and events of life. Peter Marty, who is a Lutheran pastor, tells of visiting one of his elderly church members who was dying in the ICU of a local hospital. And there he ran into her forty-something son, whose name was Jason. Jason’s mother, Marty’s church member, had lived her life deeply

into God's Word – and such was very visible in the way she had approached her death, the confidence and peace with which she was offering herself up to God in death. Her son, however, had had little use for any of that Bible stuff, and had rejected it in his adult years completely. Marty talks about how hard it was to convey to him the promises of God's Word regarding his mother's dying – how hard to explain the Biblical hope to someone who had not ever invested himself in that Word. He says he ended up feeling sad for Jason – he seemed to Marty like a lost soul suddenly brought up against a harsh reality against which he had no defense, about which he had no comprehension, and in the face of which he had absolutely no hope or consolation to latch on to.

But as sorry as he felt for Jason, Marty said that the whole situation only made him more aware of, and more grateful for, that Word in which Jason's mother had made her home, that Word in which Marty himself had made his home – and for all that ways that Word had made its home deeply in his heart and mind:

*The widely divergent trajectories of our two lives suddenly struck me. To someone of unbelief sitting beside you in a hospital waiting room, how do you describe the power of faith, the significance of hope, or the meaning of life? How do you realistically acquaint them with the riches or comfort of faith during a 20-minute sit-down?*

*You can't. Faith is a deeply ingrained condition formed through steady habits, disciplined practices, and reliable instincts that take shape over long stretches of time. It's a way of life that acquires its layers and contours incrementally, developing ever so gradually and often imperceptibly . . . The Christian life doesn't emerge overnight any more than friendship does. The internal dispositions that form our character establish themselves often unselfconsciously and over the course of many uneventful days . . .*

*My hope is that God's grace would buoy the faith accumulated within me. The countless hymn texts, song lyrics, and musical tunes I know by heart; the numerous Bible stories and passages I've absorbed and committed to memory over a lifetime; the human experiences of a faith community that remind me of all of this – I know of nothing that comes close to this sustenance of the heart. It's vast and deep.<sup>2</sup>*

“If you will abide in my word,” says Jesus. If we will abide in His Word, and learn to let His Word abide in us, then that Word will be there when we need it most – faith, understanding, trust, and the power to make it through will be there when we need it most. “If you will abide in my word, says Jesus, “you are truly my disciples.” That word “disciple” meaning someone taught by Jesus how to think, how to see the world, how to live in the world, and how to have a faith strong enough to stand up and take whatever may come. Resources of a faith vast and deep.

But that's not all – a promise follows. “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth . . .” Note carefully how Jesus puts that promise. Not you will know some truths – though His Word does indeed teach us lots of truthful things about this world and

about ourselves and about how we are to live before God and neighbor. But what Jesus says here is that we will know the truth. The capital letter “t” Truth. *“If you will abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth.”* That truth which is the single most important truth any human being can and must know. That truth which undergirds the entirety of our existence – the very ground we walk upon, the very air we breathe. That truth which alone best comprehends our past, best explains our present, best puts into proper perspective our future. *“You will know the truth!”*

And what is that truth? Simply put – it is Jesus. We will come to know Jesus, personally and deeply. Not so much something we come to know and believe about Jesus, as much as Jesus Himself – He is the truth. He Himself put it that way, saying to us, *“I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.”*<sup>3</sup> *“I am the Truth.”* By abiding in His Word, we come to know Jesus as the truth of our lives, the truth undergirding our lives, the truth comprehending our lives, the truth in which we live and move and have our being.

For in Jesus Christ, by His very coming to us on earth, we see that the great truth of our lives, that the great truth behind all of creation, that the great truth in which indeed we live and move and have our being is nothing other than this: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”*<sup>4</sup> The truth, incarnate in Jesus, is that our lives have been met by a love and a mercy so great, so powerful, so complete that not even death will be able to tear us apart from Him, not even death will be able to tear us apart from one another in Him.

*“For God so loved the world”* – that is the truth of our lives, that we are inescapably, entirely, unconditionally, nothing we could ever do to lose it loved by God. *“For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son”* – meaning loved by God so much that He sent His only Son into this world to save us from our sin and death. Love and mercy – that is the truth we meet in Jesus. Love! And mercy! In Jesus Christ we behold the one great truth about our lives – that love and mercy go behind and before us, and meet us in every moment in between. And by that divine love and mercy, we have been saved, we are even now being saved, and we shall be saved forevermore.

That’s why He gave us this meal, our Lord’s Supper – so that we would remember that Truth, rejoice in that Truth. For, in this meal, He reminds us of what He did for us on His cross. How He took upon Himself all our sin, all our brokenness, all our pain and suffering and sorrow – how He took all of that from off of our shoulders and upon His own, took it from out of our hearts and into His own. All so that we might be forgiven, cleansed, made new. So that we are now forgiven for everything broken, sinful, and shameful that we have ever done. So that we should be set free not only from the guilt of what we have inflicted upon others, but set free also from the pain and deformity the sin of others have inflicted upon us. The truth, here represented in bread and cup, body and blood, is that Jesus has set us free from any and all captivity to what we have been. He has saved us from our past – love and mercy.

And here at this table, in this meal, He refreshes in us the truth that our future lies also in His loving, merciful, and powerful hands. And that, indeed, nothing can ever separate us from what His love and mercy have planned for us. We at this meal, around His table, are reminded of

what is to come – reminded of that coming day when we, and all God’s children, will feast with Him in glory. Feast with Him at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb of God.<sup>5</sup>

That coming day when He will have made all things new, just as He promised us He would.<sup>6</sup> That coming day when we will dwell with Him in His Kingdom, and He will dwell with us nevermore to part. That coming day when He will wipe away every tear from our eyes – because death shall be no more, because sorrowing and crying and hurting shall be no more.<sup>7</sup> Having saved us from our past, He has prepared for us a future good beyond the powers of our imagining. At this table, here represented, is that Jesus Christ has set us free not only from our captivity to sin, but us set us free also all fear and uncertainty over what will become of us. Here He reminds us that He has set before us a future in which shall only be love and joy and peace forevermore. Love and mercy.

And here at this table, in this meal, He comes to us in this present moment as the host of the feast – through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit around and within us, to show us that He is with us even now, in this present moment to lead us on to that coming day. Here, as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we remember that He feeds us daily with His Bread of Life<sup>8</sup>, sustains us with His gift of Living Water<sup>9</sup>. And so is with us in this present moment, with us always as He promised He would be, to guide and to correct us, to uplift and to sustain and to bless us. And so setting us free to live in this present moment according to and out of His ever-present love and mercy toward us. Setting us free in this present moment to stand up to all that would diminish us – the ways of this fallen world around us – and to live instead lives shaped by His love and mercy, lives made brave by His love and mercy, lives no longer conformed to what is but now being transformed in light of what is to be.<sup>10</sup> Here at this table, He renews us in our capacity to live lives shaped by His love and mercy, and so made able to share that love and mercy with our neighbor.

That is the truth of Jesus Christ: that in Him we are met by love and mercy from our God. That in response to all that we are and have been, in response to all that this world presently is – He has chosen love and mercy towards us. And to abide in that Word, to know this as the truth made plain by His coming to us – this is what it means to be set free. Set free from what has been. Set free to hope in what is coming. Set free to live in this present moment – not by fear, not by pain, not by the broken ways of this broken world around us – but to live in this present moment in, by, and for His love and mercy towards us. Set free by Christ, that we might live free in Christ.<sup>11</sup> That is the promise He makes to us this morning: *“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, The Preaching Life (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1993), p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Peter W. Marty, “Accumulated Faith,” The Christian Century, Vol. 141, No. 2 (February, 2024), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> John 14:6.

<sup>4</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 13:29; Revelation 19:6-9.

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 21:5.

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 21:3-4.

<sup>8</sup> John 6:35.

<sup>9</sup> John 4:1-15; 7:37-38.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 12:2.

<sup>11</sup> Galatians 5:1.