

May 3, 2015

## **“Generations to Come”**

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris



*John 5: 1-4a*

*After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

*Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.*

“Abide in me as I abide in you.” This beautiful command and promise of Jesus carries forward the theme of the Good Shepherd from last Sunday. That Good Shepherd who is the king of love; Christ who is with us, always, who guides us, shelters us, lifts us, protects us, loves us. “Abide in me,” he commands, “as I abide in you,” he promises.

The actual verb “abide” does not appear very frequently in Scripture. But the notion of Christ remaining in us and us remaining in Christ is consistent throughout this teaching section of John’s Gospel.

The whole passage begins with the act of Jesus washing the disciples’ feet at the Last Supper which John introduces with these words: “Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”

The teaching concludes with Jesus’ prayer which ends with these words: “I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” “Abiding” is a consistent term throughout Jesus’ teaching here, from beginning to end.

Christ’s love for us abides in us, remains in us, through everything in this life and beyond, unto life everlasting.

This understanding and experience of God’s presence in our lives across time is sounded in today’s reading from Psalm 22 as well. Through verses 29 and 30, the past, present and future of God’s relationship with God’s people is celebrated. “To God, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down.” Those who have gone before and are now departed continue in relationship with God. “I shall live for God,” the Psalmist declares. In the present moment, the faithful choose to abide in God, to live for God. And as for the future—“future descendants will serve God, generations to come will be told about my Lord.” The story of God’s love will abide into the future, in generations to come.

It is the deep bond of love between God and God’s people, for us known through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, that abides across generations past, in and through those alive now, and on in those future descendants yet to be born.

We celebrate that timeless trajectory of God’s abiding love this morning as we will gather at this table in a few moments and participate in the sacrament of holy communion, the sacrament that binds us to Jesus and to the church in every time and place. It is also that timeless trajectory of God’s abiding love that we celebrate in the holy baptism of Caleb Archibald Eskridge this morning. Do you know that he is the 4<sup>th</sup> generation in this family to be baptized in this congregation? How awesome is that?!? So he has his own great-grandparents and grandparents here with him this morning along with his parents and his godparents who are his aunt and uncle. They are his immediate family, plus he has his whole church family here representing generations past, generations present and generations yet to come of those who abide in God’s love in Christ Jesus.

Generation after generation after generation after generation of those who, as our baptism liturgy says, enter into a special relationship with Christ in baptism.

Let me go back now to where we started—Jesus' words from John's Gospel—"abide in me as I abide in you." That one sentence that carries the promise, yes, of God's abiding love, but the command as well. Christ promises to abide in us, now and going forward. And Christ also commands us to abide in him, to make the choice to remain in his love.

For sure, Adam and Brittany have already made at least a million choices about Caleb's life. His middle name, Archibald, giving proud honor to his grandfather. Decisions about what's in his nursery, what he eats, what he wears, how they interact with him, who they entrust to care for him when they go out, and so on and so on. Not the least of which is their decision to present him today for baptism, marking his formal entrance into the family of faith, this outward and visible sign of the grace of Jesus Christ, the grace through which he now enters a special relationship with Christ. And so, on behalf of the whole church, generations past, generations present, and future generations yet to come, Kurt asked them: "Will you nurture this child in Christ's holy church, that by your teaching and example he may be guided to accept God's grace for himself, to profess his faith openly, and to lead a Christian life?" "We will," they said.

Another way to ask that same question would be to ask: will you choose to abide in Christ so that Caleb may come to learn and to know and to experience for himself that abiding love of God in Christ Jesus which has birthed him, given him life, promises him life eternal, and will carry him every step of the way through his life here on earth? So that when the time comes, at his confirmation, he may in turn choose for himself to abide in that love.

We are blessed to have several more baptisms and Confirmation awaiting in this month of May and into June. We are blessed with an abundance of babies and youth and families choosing, carrying forward, a legacy so precious to us all, living into it with courage and conviction and faithfulness in the present moment, and pointing to future generations yet to come and to the abiding love of God that breaks through the barriers of time, uniting us with God in Christ and with one another in this abiding love.

Thanks be to God!