

Text: John 15:1-8

## ABIDING AND CONFIDING

Church picnics! They have a hard time competing with air conditioning and television, but oh what fun and wonderful memories they bring. Announced from the pulpit, printed in the bulletin and word spreads quickly; everyone brings their own lunch and that iced tea and lemonade is furnished. There might be singing, games and sack races, but most of all, there is always good fellowship at these happy gatherings.

There was once a young man named Jeff who learned just that morning of the afternoon's church picnic. He hurried home from church to pack his lunch and get to the picnic grounds. But, lo and behold, when he opened the icebox door, he discovered only a single piece of dried up baloney and two stale pieces of bread (one of them a heel). And to make things worse, there was barely enough mustard to color his knuckles when he tried to scrape the bottom of the jar. Nevertheless he made his sandwich, wrapped it in waxed paper and placed it in a large paper bag (so it would look as if he had a great deal more than a single sandwich) and set out for the picnic.

When Jeff arrived, the grounds were already crowded and the only empty spot he could find was at the end of a table next to the Lawson family. As he took his sandwich from the bag and began to unwrap it, the Smith's began to spread their feast as well. They had a warm, red checkered tablecloth heaped with fried chicken, potato salad and baked beans that smelled like heaven to Jeff. To top it all off, Mrs. Lawson brought out two of the biggest chocolate cream pies Jeff had ever seen!

He glanced at the bountiful feast and then back at his own meager meal when he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Mrs. Lawson, "Why don't we pool our food?" she was asking. "And we can all eat together!"

"No, I don't think so," Jeff embarrassingly told her. "I'm not really all that hungry, so I only brought a sandwich," he said, hanging his head somewhat.

"Oh, please!" she smiled. "We just love bologna; we'll cut it into pieces so everyone can enjoy it along with some fried chicken and all the fixings, and of course, some chocolate pie."

And so, Jeff came to the picnic that day as a pauper and stayed to feast like a king. He had found a place to abide.

Abiding is more than just being somewhere. All of us are somewhere, all of the time, but to find a place where we truly belong, now that is a different story. One can dwell in a house, but abides in a home. We confide not in its size or amenities, but in the fact that it is HOME!

Much of my life I felt like a trespasser in the church. I dwelt there, loved to go to church, but never quite felt as though I belonged until just few short years ago when through the UMC I found that I really did belong. What brought me to that place were the words to an old hymn penned by A.B. Simpson, who was the founder of the Christian Missionary Alliance church, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Listen to the words of his song (and be very thankful I'm not singing them to you):



A.B. Simpson – circa 1919

I have learned the wondrous secret of abiding in the Lord;  
I have found the strength and sweetness of confiding in His Word.  
I have tasted life's pure fountain, I am drinking of His blood;  
I have lost myself in Jesus, I am sinking into God.

I am crucified with Jesus and He lives and reigns in me;  
I have ceased from all my struggling, 'tis no longer I but He.  
All my will is yielded to Him and His Spirit dwells within;  
And His precious blood each moment keeps me cleansed and free from sin.

All my cares I cast upon Him and He bears them all away;  
All my fears and grief's I tell Him, all my needs from day to day.  
All my strength I draw from Jesus, by His breath I live and move;  
Even His very mind He gives me and His faith and life and love.

For my words I take His wisdom, for my works His Spirit's power;  
For my ways His gracious presence, guards and guides me every hour;  
Of my heart He is the portion, of my joy the boundless spring,  
Savior, sanctifier, healer, glorious Lord and coming King.

I'm abiding in the Lord and confiding in His Word;  
And I'm hiding, safely hiding, in the bosom of His love.

What a wonderful secret to abide in the Lord, **but really, not a secret at all**. We who call ourselves Christians are invited to be more than spectators, more than dwellers or squatters. On my recent vacation to Fiji, a friend there pointed out a ramshackle village of very temporary huts and said, "Those are the squatters. They don't own the land and are very transient, but the village chief allows them to live there".

Therein lies part of the problem. We often don't feel as though we truly possess the land that God has given us. Instead of living in the *Promised Land*, we act as though we are squatters or at best, just a guest in someone else's home when in reality, we, by divine birthright, own the land. The 'home' belongs to us.

Abiding in Christ is like sinking down in your own comfortable chair and resting securely in your own bed. It is giving ourselves physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually and financially to something larger than self and in giving, find true dwelling and protection in Christ, who is our all in all.

Getting "lost" in Jesus is not like the TV show where a group was stranded on a deserted island, but rather, it is releasing our struggles, yielding our will to God's purposes and doing the work God directs and equips us to do. It is here that our abiding place becomes a place of confidence, promise and rest. It is gathering here in the church, sharing with each other from our experiences, helping one another and those who are in need.

Confiding, for the Christian, is not a secret either. It is where we can "*be still and know*" God; it is the place where in quietness and confidence we find strength. Many misquote the bible with the familiar phrase, "*God helps those who help themselves*", when in reality we who abide and confide in God know that we are called to be God's hands, helping those who **cannot** help themselves.

Abiding and confiding is NOT duty, it is not a rule to be kept or a distasteful task to be accomplished. Abiding and confiding is **relationship!** It is living, moving, ministering, caring, and sharing. Here we are invited to face life's monumental struggles together; here we help the helpless and casting our care on Jesus because He cares for us, we care of others!

In closing, it is important to know that calling ourselves Christians, or Methodists is not just a title to invoke status or somehow impress God or others. Being a Christian and being a Methodist, is living in relationship with God and with others. It is generously supporting your church (II Corinthians: Not a commandment, but a grace. Excel in the grace of giving), being faithful in your attendance and participating to the extent we are able, in both mission and ministry. In a healthy relationship, with each one doing what they are equipped to do, no one is overburdened or expected to carry more than their share. YOU are important to LUMC! No matter how big or little, visible or invisible your part may be, if you are not abiding, with confidence, then the relationship we share is lacking.

Truly, it is NO secret! We abide in the Lord and find that it is **HOME!** We have confidence in God and it is RELATIONSHIP. Truly, by God's very breath, each of us lives and moves and has their being!

***"I'm abiding in the Lord and confiding in God's Word, and I'm hiding, safely hiding in the bosom of God's love!"***