

April 7: John 15-17

### Chapter 15

Jesus continues teaching his disciples all that he wants them to know before he is betrayed. Chapter 15 includes one of Jesus' most famous metaphors for our life in Christ as the church. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches, and the Father is the vinegrower (or gardener). The gardener provides what we need to grow healthy and bear much fruit (this includes pruning, which can be understood as cleansing or refining). Jesus (and his teachings) is our foundational source of peace and growth. God wants us to grow, for God is glorified by our health and growth! To bear much fruit as a branch of Christ is to provide what the world needs: Christ's message of love for the world. Jesus loves us the same way the Father loves the Son! The concept of "abiding" is a really important one. To abide also means "to remain" or "to love and obey" Jesus' commandments... and all of his commandments are boiled down into the new commandment from ch. 13 "love one another as I have loved you." If you just do that, you will bear Christ's fruit for the world. Jesus shares this metaphor of the vine and branches as a comfort to his fearful disciples: even though he has to go away, they will always continue to abide in him and with him, so long as they keep his commandments of love. The intention of these teachings is for the disciples to experience complete JOY through their ongoing relationship with Jesus! In vs. 13, Jesus expands on the new commandment, saying that the very greatest expression of love is to lay down one's life for one's friend... examples of this may be donating a kidney or bone marrow, laying down one's life to become a caregiver for a sick or elderly loved one, or literally sacrificing one's self for the life of another (though outside of military experiences, these are few and far between). Jesus says this to make clear to his disciples that though he is their teacher and their master, he is so much more, he considers them his FRIENDS. He chose each one of them. In Baptism, this is true for us as well. We do not choose Christ, he chooses us, he binds himself to us, he is our friend.

Beginning in vs. 18, Jesus' teachings turn to a dark, but important theme. He is preparing his friends for what's to come. Not in spite of, but BECAUSE they are his friends, they will face persecution, just as he himself is persecuted. Jesus comforts his disciples with the truth that they won't face persecution alone, they will have the witness of the Advocate (the Holy Spirit) who will give them the words they need to rightly share what they have seen and experienced of Jesus.

### Chapter 16

Jesus continues to tell his disciples the truth about what is to come for them. The things he describes are the real kinds of persecutions that John's community would have experienced toward the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. It is described throughout the book of Acts how those who persecuted the church (including St. Paul) thought they were doing God's work. Jesus tells his disciples that it is for their benefit that he is going away, for when Jesus leaves them they will receive the Advocate. The Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, and Jesus promises that the Spirit will "guide you in the truth" which is important for times of persecution when it can be difficult to discern the truth, or when the church may start to doubt that they're on the right path because they're constantly assaulted by counter-narratives. The Spirit testifies to God's truth and will reveal God's truth to the

church. These disciples really need the Spirit's help in discerning the truth, as they're constantly confused in John's gospel. They don't understand what Jesus is saying about "A little while and you will no longer see me, then after a little while you'll see me again." In their defense, I doubt any one of us would have understood him at the time. So, beginning in vs. 20, Jesus speaks plainly to them about what is to come. Shockingly, he uses the beautiful metaphor of childbirth to describe what his death and resurrection will be like for the church. They will weep and mourn like a woman in throws of the agony of birthpangs, but (as my midwife used to say) that pain has a purpose. Their mourning and weeping will be turned into the endless joy of Christ being brought back into the world through the resurrection! The tomb is the spiritual womb, birthing Christ anew into the world for the joy of all. Because of the truth of the resurrection, no one can ever take our joy away. If all else falls away, the truth remains that Christ overcame the grave, and we shall also. Even in the face of persecution, abiding joy is a defining characteristic of the church. The disciples confess their belief in what Jesus has said, but Jesus warns that they will all scatter and abandon him. He urges them to have peace and courage in the face of persecution, for through his death and resurrection he has overcome anything the world can throw at us!

## Chapter 17

Chapter 17 is referred to as "Jesus' Great Declaratory Prayer." This prayer concludes his teachings to his disciples on this night of his betrayal. Parts of this prayer are reminiscent of the Lord's Prayer (which Jesus teaches in Matthew and Luke's gospels). The prayer's purpose is for the ongoing mission of the church, focusing first on Jesus being rooted in the Father, then on the disciples being rooted in Jesus, and finally on future disciples (US) being rooted in the teachings of the those first disciples (apostles) –this is what is means when we say in the creed that we believe in the "apostolic church", that is the teachings that have been handed down to us from the time of the first apostles. "The hour has come" and "glorify your son" refer to the time of his betrayal and crucifixion. This is the moment that the last 5 chapters have led up to. Jesus describes the eternal life he gives as "that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." Through his death, Jesus finishes the work that the Father has given him to do, Jesus now prays that through that work he will return to the Father to experience the glory with him that he knew from the beginning of time. Death is not the end for Jesus, but the beginning of his return to God.

Jesus prays to the Father for his disciples: protection & unity (vs. 11), complete joy (vs. 13), protection from the evil one (vs. 15), and sanctification (vs 17) BECAUSE Jesus is sending them into the world with his word of truth.

Beginning in vs. 20, Jesus prays for US, for all who will believe in him through the apostle's teachings. He prays that we will be ONE, that the world will believe Jesus was sent by God, and that God loves the world just as much as God loves Jesus (vs. 23). Jesus prays that we will all be drawn to the place where he is, so that we may see his true glory (vs. 24). Finally, and most powerfully, Jesus prays that the love with which the Father loved the Son may be IN us, so that Jesus himself will dwell in us.