

Jesus says: 'Abide in me as I abide in you.'

Theologians through the ages have written about Christians' occasional preference for thinking of Jesus as being something of a 'wimp'.

Dorothy Sayers, better known for her Lord Peter Wimsey mysteries than her essays, wrote in exasperation in her book *The Greatest Drama Ever Staged*:

"We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified him 'meek and mild,' and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies."

I do like Dorothy Sayers!

Also, we don't have to look very far to see this image played out in liturgy and song. Thinking of the hymn written in 1921 by Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy...:

Awake, awake to love and work!

The lark is in the sky;

The fields are wet with diamond dew;

The worlds awake to cry

Their blessings on the Lord of life,

As He goes meekly by.

Jesus is depicted here as meekly passing by.

Yuk...!!!

Also the Midlane hymn found on the website called 'Kid-iddles' which begins:

There's a Friend for little children,

Above the bright, blue sky...

I think any of our children here might be tempted to say Yuktoo!

Walk into church halls across the land, and any depictions of Jesus are often by definition, soft, solemn, composed.

The scripture passage we call "The Beatitudes" -- or as the writer Robert Schuller publicized them, the *Be (Happy) Attitudes* -- is much preferred over Jesus throwing the money-changers out of the temple. Jesus welcoming children is more often cited as descriptive of our Lord than his pronouncement "I come not to bring peace, but a sword."

Jesus says: 'Abide in me as I abide in you.'

Whoops!.. here we go again!...even the Precentor's tone of delivery has been 'sucked in'

Oh, this is so comforting we feel!

These words in Greek as in English are alluring and welcoming and warm. We love to hear the reassurance that comes with our Lord inviting us into a kind of security, a resting in 'the everlasting arms of Jesus' just like another old and unfortunate hymn proclaims. These words have been offered for generations as words of comfort. They seem to declare the loving goodness of Jesus, the gentlest of saviours....

The scholar might suggest that it is a shame they have often been interpreted so selectively and out of context.

Good news? Yes of course!

Comforting and encouraging words? Well in part!

But is that all? Certainly not!

There's more to it than that. If we allow ourselves to stop with the comforting words, we miss the message. This passage also includes the message of pruning, and being thrown away, and withering -- of being thrown into the fire and burned. That is the part we often omit, or we don't 'hear'... and when we do it is rather sobering.

The message of Jesus is clear when read closely and in its entirety.

He expects something of us. He expects something of us.

He is not meek and mild, and doesn't expect us simply 'to be' at least in this inert sense... we are not 'called' simply to bask in the sunshine of his salvation. Our call is his call. Our call is 'to do', as was his work of salvation.

Another excerpt from this same gospel reading demonstrates the same.

"Abide in me as I abide in you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." These words are from the same gospel, and even use the admonition "Abide in me." But listen closely to the difference: "*Abide in me as I abide in you.*"

How many ways can we say this today?

-- Quid pro quo.

or

-- Canon Wilson in his wisdom might say: 'No such thing as a free lunch.'

or

-- What goes around comes around.

In other sayings of Jesus we hear:

-- Do unto others *as you would have them do unto you.*

-- Forgive us our sins, *as we forgive those who sin against us.*

-- Love one another *as God loves us.*

'As' in Greek here means 'in the same manner' or 'to the same extent'.

Therefore the reading becomes:

--Do unto others **to the same extent** *as you would have them do unto you.*

-- Forgive us our sins Lord **to the same extent** *as we forgive those who sin against us.*

-- Love one another **to the same extent** *as God loves us.*

Tough stuff...great questions are being asked of us.

However it's phrased, this is a two-part deal. The responsibility goes both ways. There is mutuality, reciprocity.

Just as Jesus is not the meek and mild saviour, neither are his disciples expected to be passive and inactive.

Here, the vineyard language, so richly foreshadowed in the theology of the Old Testament, describes our relationship to God through Jesus,

and makes clear the expectations of discipleship, the expectation Christ has of those who are 'grafted in' and of those children 'grafted in' specifically today through baptism.

Christ has expectations of Elizabeth, Jasper, Christopher and Samuel, and because of their reliance on their parents and godparents for speaking of their faith, Christ has expectations of their parents and godparents too!

This is the time of year when many of us (gardeners at heart), begin planting seeds, or hailing off to the local nursery for bedding plants, or tending the shoots emerging from winter soil.

Well... so I am told!

But we all know that, just because we *want* something to grow, 'will' doesn't guarantee that it will. We also know that getting our roses to bloom means cutting back the canes; that encouraging the growth of the tomato plants means pinching off the gangly stems; that getting a second bloom from the pansies, or the sweet peas and zinnias, means cutting back the early flowers.

Well...so I am told!

If something is growing where it doesn't belong, we pull it out and call it a weed.(The Precentor often pulls things out and then gets told to put them back because they are not weeds in the first place! Stick to theology and music Dad... you are much safer!)

If something is dead, or not growing well, we cut it off. If something is too big, or too small, we move it, stake it, tie it back. This is what John's gospel describes of God and the disciples' learning process. Gardening is not an armchair activity, and neither is faith. There are choices to be made. It is difficult work. It can be frustrating work... but it is Gospel work!

All of this conviction that we are called and expected to answer our Lord's love with action, with *fruit bearing*, is rooted in our baptism with the promise "I will, *with God's help*."

There's that give-and-take construction again.

In this Easter season it is good to remember that for the earliest Christians, baptism was the claiming of faith and being claimed by God. It was the nurturing and tending of the seedling until the tender shoot grew strong. The preparation for baptism took months and even years to accomplish because of all there was to learn and do in order to take on an active role in the community of faith. We stand on the shoulders

of these saints in our present-day faith, charged to remember that the activity of faith is not easy or optional.

“Abide in me as I abide in you.” Jesus said. This doesn’t mean settle down... it means get busy!