



2019 General Assembly July 20-24
Des Moines, Iowa

Abiding in Jesus: Loving and Serving

By the Rev. Nestor Gomez

Reading a text in the gospel of John twenty centuries later confront us with some questions that are not easy to answer: Who wrote this? What audience was address to? What was the purpose in the author's mind? We cannot pretend to answer all those questions, but recently biblical scholars affirm that the text was to be addressed to the Johannine community and that a prevalent theme in it is to abide in Jesus. The unity between Jesus and his Father and the unity between Jesus and his community in the time of crisis are crucial points to understand the meaning and purpose of the author.

John 15¹ is inserted in the middle of what has been called "The farewell discourses" (13-17). This section records Jesus' last words to his disciples before his death. Here Jesus extends an invitation to his disciples to abiding (remaining) in him to bear more fruit. But how can we remain in the true vine in a time of crisis? How can we abide in God and each other in a time of suffering? It would be difficult to remain in Jesus if we do not abide to God and each other in love and service (15:9-12). The Greek word used for love in John 15: 9-10 is *agápē*. This not a brotherly love (*philia*) or a romantic-erotic love (*eros*), but a divine love that transcends and goes beyond emotions and rationality. It is the type of love between Jesus and his Father: unconditional love. As a community of followers, we shall abide in Jesus' *agape* and we shall abide each other by this *agape*. In time of crisis, it is this type of love that unities us and gives us hope in the suffering. The author of the gospel of John exhorts us: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (13:34).

How can we show this *agape*? Serving! Loving without action is a fruitless love. After washing his disciples' feet, Jesus said: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (13:15). Serving is how we show the love of Jesus to an unredeemed and suffering world. Serving

¹ All biblical references are taken from the New International Version (NIV).

those who have been put aside in the margins of our society is how we show Jesus' agape. As a community of love, we serve others not based on what we have done for Jesus but based on he has done for us. He is the spring of this agape that enables to serve others in unity unconditionally. John Calvin states, "when our services and outward actions proceed from the love of Christ; for in vain do the arms, and the feet, and the whole body toil, if the love of God does not reign in the heart."² A servant attitude flourishes naturally in a time of crisis when we abide in Jesus' love, the true vine, like he abides in his Father. An abiding joyful life in Jesus can be lived serving others in love. Jesus is the true vine and we are the branches. If we remain in him, we will bear much fruit of love and service because without Jesus we can do nothing (15:5).

Questions:

What does it mean for you as follower of Jesus to be abided in his love in our current political and economic crisis?

What obstacles do you face when you abide in Jesus' love and serve others unconditionally?

How can we abide in Jesus and love our enemies?

² John Calvin, *Commentary on John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 56.