About the Text

The passage that is the basis for today’s lesson is part of the cycle of affirmations that Jesus makes about himself: “I am.” In this case, the affirmation is, “I am the true vine.” This allegory of the vine is embedded in what scholars call the farewell discourses of Jesus (John 14–16). Just before, in the chapter prior to the passage we are pondering today and likewise ensuing from another “I am” (the way, the truth, and the life), Jesus presents to his disciples the relationship he has with his Father: “Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me” (John 14:11a-b). In other words, Jesus explains that the One abides from eternity in the Other.

Throughout the allegory of the vine, Jesus makes two invitations. First, he invites us to abide in him and bear fruit; second, he makes us aware of the futility of being separated from him, because “without me ye can do nothing.” This passage also ends in a double clause. He first explains what it means to abide in Jesus, and after this explanation, turns it into a commandment: “that ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12). Love is what lets us be linked to God. Love is the essence of how Jesus abided in his Father: “…for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24d). In the same way that love affirmed a relationship of mutual permanence between the Vine and his Father, it creates a similar relationship between him who is the Vine and us who are the branches.

The relationship between abiding and loving then becomes completely clear: “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you; continue ye in my love” (John 15:9). It was love that compelled Jesus
to raise himself up on the ignominious tree, just as the vine is raised up on the tree that gives it and its fruit life.

**Reflections on the Text for Today**

Even though the relationship of human beings with God is personal, it is by no means individual. Our love toward God must be displayed in our love toward our neighbor. The Decalogue contains the same amount of commandments related to God as those related to the neighbor. Our relationship with our neighbor is a reflection of our relationship with God—“...in earth, as it is in heaven.” Failing to exercise love separates us from Him who is the vine and without whom we can do nothing.

Even though the word *hatred* is in technical terms the antonym of the word *love*, in practical terms, selfishness is the opposite of love. Selfishness, both covert and overt, reigns in today’s world. We frequently look for ways to dictate what “I want,” in a sort of emotional gluttony, as it were. Let us remember that the three great scandals in the early Christian church were linked to selfishness and lack of love (Ananias and Saphira, Acts 5:1-11; daily distribution to the widows, Acts 6:1; Simon the sorcerer, Acts 8:9-21).

We currently live in a society that underscores selfishness and considers the teaching of love to be a weak or defunct force. Many leaders in different spheres seem to exult in words and actions that are contrary to love. We fall into a trap if we think that is the correct way to conduct ourselves. Every time our spirit, words, or actions go against love, it is like we are trying to be separate from the true Vine, and separated from Him who is the true Vine, we can do nothing.

**Questions for reflection and discussion**

1. How can I respond in love even when I am not being treated with love?
2. How can I show love to my rebellious son/daughter, the brother/sister in my congregation with a worship style that is drastically different from mine, a person from the opposite political party, my unruly neighbor, my disrespectful coworker, etc.?
3. What are the areas in which it is especially difficult for me to “abide in the Lord?”
4. In addition to the metaphor (example) of the vine, what other examples can you think of that help you see/understand how we should remain in the Lord?
5. What concepts of this lesson in the sections About the Text and Reflections on the Text for Today have particularly caught your attention? Why?
6. How do you compare or contrast the concept of “abide in me” you had before this lesson to the one you have now based on the discussion in class?
7. How do you interpret the illustration that accompanies this lesson? Have you thought of this metaphor before? Do you believe that the branch is likewise crucified? Review what the writer of the letter to the Galatians thinks about this (2:20). How does this verse focus on the concept of “abide in me?”