

Get ready for the GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2019

JULY 20-24

IOWA EVENTS CENTER
DES MOINES, IA



Demeurez en moi • Permanezcan en mí
Fè youn ak mwen • 내 안에 거하라
John 15: 1-5

Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)
in the United States and Canada

CONTENTS

- EIGHT BIBLE STUDIES
- NEW SCHEDULE
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Disciples.org/ga

#Abide2019



@GADisciples



[Facebook.com/groups/docgeneralassembly/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/docgeneralassembly/)

Join us on the first night of General Assembly for ...
A Night of Good News!

*A Branch & Vine Dinner Program,
Hosted by Disciples Church Extension Fund,
Hope Partnership and New Church Ministry*

Featuring stories of help, hope and harmony
to inspire the Disciple in all of us



Saturday, July 20, 2019, 5:00 – 6:30 pm
Iowa Events Center
\$25 per person

Also, don't miss . . .

Shine!

A pre-Assembly event for church leaders who know facilities come **AFTER** mission.
Saturday, July 20, 2019, 8:30am – 12:00pm

Plus **TEN WORKSHOPS** on topics like new church development,
congregational finances, facility use for ministry, church transformation,
capital fundraising, innovative leadership and investing your values.

Register for the Branch & Vine Dinner and the Shine Event at www.disciplescef.org





WELCOME



Rev. Terri Hord Owens
General Minister and
President



**Rev. Sue Woods, chair of
the Local Arrangements
Committee, on her way
to another meeting of the
committee in the Iowa
winter.**

Hello, Disciples!

I am so pleased to invite you to attend the General Assembly in Des Moines this summer!

We will have a rich opportunity to dig into our theme scripture (John 15:1-5) through the Bible studies contained in this planning guide, through powerful preaching during worship and through morning Bible study sessions Monday through Wednesday. To “abide” means to remain, to stay, even to persist. I pray that you will find meaningful ways to abide in Christ before, during and after our time together at General Assembly.

We will hear about exciting mission from MissionFest stories and general ministries working on our behalf.

We will be gifted with the opportunity to learn with workshops ranging from elder training to administrative ministry and training for both lay and clergy leaders.

We will come together at tables – the Lord’s Table in worship, luncheons with friends and dinners to learn about ministries of the Church.

Most of all, we will be in the presence of other Disciples, sharing life, love and passion for mission together. Find out more in the following pages.

I pray each of you will join us together as we praise our Holy God for all the wonderful abundance that flows over and around us. As we seek to abide in Christ, may we find that the fruit we bear is a blessing to all around us.

See you in Des Moines!

With God’s love –

Terri Hord Owens

General Minister and President

Why Iowa? Every region has its strengths: hospitality in the South, laid back surfer culture on the West Coast, a friendly “eh?” in Canada. Iowa has NICE – a mixture of friendliness and trust – just waiting for you at the 2019 General Assembly.

The Local Arrangements Committee is planning an Iowa Nice Welcome just for you. Everyone, no matter the age or ability, will find wonderful things to do and share in these Fields of Opportunities we call home.

The Good Times Committee has created lots of ways for you to experience the Heartland, beginning on Saturday with the Des Moines Farmers Market, ranked the 3rd best farmers market in America! We’ve also planned daily bike rides, exploring the many bike trails in and around Des Moines, or strolling the River Walk beside the Convention Center.

For a little culture, you can tour the World Food Prize Hall with its Beaux-arts style building, the Iowa Historical Museum, or the Tudor/Gothic Salisbury Manor.

For a little rest you can walk a Labyrinth Park or wake up to Yoga on the River.

There will be everything from family-oriented scavenger hunts to an adult-oriented Brew Cruise.

Add to that a MissionFest, meaningful worship, the GA Choir, and digital Skywalk Video Maps to make it easy to navigate to and from just about anywhere and you have Iowa Nice!

Every place is special in this world that God declared Good. But, let’s face it, not every place has a Butter Chalice Photo Op. So take a minute and register now! You don’t want to miss it and we can’t wait to meet you!

Sue Woods

Local Arrangements Committee Chair





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Stop by our booth
to talk with your
Area Director.

SATURDAY July 20, 2019
7:00 p.m.
13th Check Offering
Opening Evening
Service

MONDAY July 22, 2019
7:00 a.m.
Ministers and Mates
Breakfast

(ticket required)
Visit www.ga.disciples.org to
purchase tickets to the event.

Visit www.pensionfund.org/GA2019 for full event information and to learn about our workshops.

Interest rates as of 1/1/2019 and subject to change. Please check www.pensionfund.org for the most up-to-date rates. The accounts maintained to manage and hold the assets of Pension Fund products and interests of such plans are not subject to registration, regulation, or reporting under the Investment Company Act of 1940, the Investment Advisers Act of 1940, the Securities Act of 1933, the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, Title 15 of the United States Code or States Securities Law. Participants and beneficiaries in any and all accounts, therefore, will not be afforded the protections of those provisions. Unlike federally insured bank deposits, deposits made into accounts held at Pension Fund are not insured or guaranteed by an agency of the United States Government (including FDIC), or any state of the United States. *Past performance is not a guarantee of future results.



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NEW SCHEDULE

FRIDAY and SATURDAY

July 19 & 20

Various pre-events

SATURDAY

July 20

► 11:45 am

Meal events

► 1:30 pm

Opening celebration

► 5:30 pm

Meal events

► 7:15 pm

Worship

► 8:45 – 10 pm

Aftersessions

SUNDAY

July 21

► Morning

Worship – in the community
(Youth and Obra Hispana in the
event center.)

► 11:45 am

Meal events

► 1:30 pm

Education begins

► 5:30 pm

Meal events

► 7:15 pm

Worship

► 8:45 – 10 pm

Aftersessions

We are going to start of the General Assembly with a celebration! Be there at 1:30 pm on Saturday, July 20, to join in the joyful start to our time together. Make sure you stay all the way through our closing sending-out celebration Wednesday morning!

See the website for more details: disciples.org/ga

Please note: You need to be registered and wearing your badge to enter education and exhibit spaces. Voting representatives should wear badges in business sessions.

MONDAY and TUESDAY

July 22 & 23

► 7 am

Meal events

► 8:30 am

Bible study

► 9 am

Business

► 11:45 am

Meal events

► 1:30 pm

Education sessions continue

► 5:45 am

Meal events

► 7:15 pm

Worship

► 8:45 – 10 pm

Aftersessions

WEDNESDAY

July 24

► 7 am

Meal events

► 8:30 am

Bible study

► 9 am

Sending Out Celebration

Registration

Saturday 9 am-6 pm

Sunday 1-6 pm

Monday 9 am-6 pm

Tuesday 9 am-6 pm

Exhibit Hall Hours

Saturday 9 am-6 pm

Sunday 1-6 pm

Monday 9 am-6 pm

Tuesday 9 am-6 pm

Youth

Chi Rho & CYF

Saturday, July 20

8:45 pm Joint Ice Cream Social

Sunday, July 21

9 – 11:30 am Youth-led worship

1:30 – 3 pm Scavenger hunt

3:15 – 4 pm Mock business session

Monday, July 22 & Tuesday, July 23

8:30 – 9 am Joint session

9-11:30 am CYF activities

Chi Rho activities

1:30 pm Joint mission project

Tuesday only

8:45 pm Closing session

Children's Programs and Child Care

All meals will be with parents.

Saturday, July 20

1:15 – 4:45 pm

Sunday, July 21

1:15 – 4:45 pm

Monday & Tuesday

8:15-11:30 am

1:15-4:45 pm





National
Benevolent
Association
of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



JULY 21: COME TO PLAY!

TRIVIA NIGHT

Who Wants to Be the
Smartest Disciple?

*Join us downtown for a trivia night
after-session, benefiting NBA!*

Sunday, July 21 * 8:45 p.m.
River Center
nbacares.org/trivia

JULY 22: DINE WITH US!

YOUNG ADULT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Intersections and Intersectionality

*Co-hosted by
Higher Education and Leadership
Ministries, National Benevolent
Association, and Obra Hispana*

Monday, July 22 * 5:00 p.m.
Iowa Events Center
ga.disciples.org



Demeurez en moi • Permanezcan en mí
Fè youn ak mwèn • 내 안에 거하라
John 15: 1-5





SPEAKERS



Saturday night

General Minister and
President Teresa "Terri"
Hord Owens



Sunday night

Rev. Dr. Nancy Gowler,
pastor, First Christian
Church, Puyallup, WA



Monday night

Rev. Ruben del Pilar,
pastor, Community
Worship Center, Gardena,
CA



Tuesday night

Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale,
pastor, Ray of Hope
Christian Church, Decatur,
GA



Tuesday night

Rev. Mark Briley, pastor,
Harvard Avenue Christian
Church, Tulsa, OK



Wednesday morning

Rev. Dr. William J.
Barber, II, co-leader, Poor
People's Campaign: A
National Call for Moral
Revival

MISSIONFEST

Mission is happening all over the Church from congregations to regions to general ministries. We're out to celebrate the many creative and varied ways Disciples are having an impact with and for God's children.

MissionFest is intended for congregational leaders. The focus is on mission models that congregations can either directly engage or create.

We are looking for congregations or ministries who: (a) have a model mission or (b) a ministry opportunity congregations can participate in.

You can submit YOUR project at <https://ga.disciples.org/exhibitors/mission-fest/>

MISSION IN DES MOINES

The mission team of the Local Arrangements Committee has been working overtime to make sure there are plenty of ways to "get dirty for Jesus" in Des Moines. A full list is online and includes clean ups and build outs, blood drives and food collection and distribution, gardening and knitting, letter writing and sorting ... you name it, there is probably an activity for your skill and ability level. See the full list, updated frequently, at <https://ga.disciples.org/local-mission/>



Come see what's new in Disciples Home Missions and Disciples Women!

*Disciples Women will host a luncheon on Sunday,
then join DHM for an after-session
Sunday evening at 8:45 pm*



Disciples Home Missions



Disciples Women

- Search & call
 - Justice & Advocacy
 - Scholarships & Grants
 - Ministry Resources for Women, Men, Children, Families, Youth & Young Adults
 - Missions & Volunteering
 - Congregational Transformation & Evangelism
 - Support for Clergy & Lay Leaders
 - Christian Education and Faith Formation
 - Mission Centers
- And many other ministries!

Be sure to stop by our booth in the exhibit hall to check out all DHM & Disciples Women have to offer! Hang out in the Family Fun area and pick up your free gift!



WWW.DISCIPLESHOMEMISSIONS.ORG

#Abide2019

#DHMissions

#DWConnect



EDUCATION

We heard you! You wanted added value from your General Assembly experience and we've got it! Classes that count. And some workshops that are not confined to just 90 minutes so you can really get into a subject in depth.

If you are a member of the clergy who needs boundary training for standing, we've got it. If you've been wanting to get solid pro-reconciliation/anti-racism training, we have an opportunity to experience that. There will be a panel discussion on the first 50 years of The Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). And there will be elder and leader training, administrative matters, software, global guests talking about mission and more.

In addition, for additional fees, Phillips Theological Seminary will be hosting a pre-event class, Doing and Denying Justice: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Social Justice. Green Chalice is planning a clergy retreat off site before the assembly entitled Resilient Hearts, Leaders and Communities. And Disciples Church Extension Fund will be offering an event called Shine for church leaders who know facilities come after mission.

Here's more of what is in store...

- Making a Difference with our Dollars
- Workshop for Institutional Chaplains
- Clergy Financial Wellness
- Peace and Reconciliation in the Korean Peninsula
- Building Generous Congregations in the Digital Age
- Table Talk: Rethinking Communion and Community
- Southern Asia Initiative introduction
- Bringing All Ages Together in Worship and Home
- Mental Health: Creative an Effective Congregational Ministry ... and the list goes on!

Two classes will be offered in Spanish and one bilingually. Go to <https://disciples.org/ga> and look for "education" under "program" to find out more.

Disciples **LGBTQ+** **Alliance**

*Setting a place at the
table for persons of
all gender expressions
and sexual orientations*

Pre-Assembly Events

LGBTQ+ People of Color Gathering

LGBTQ+ Clergy/Seminarian Gathering

Open & Affirming Aftersession

... and of course, the AllianceQ Banquet

**Find these events and more at:
disciplesallianceq.org/calendar**



Global Ministries at General Assembly

Connecting Disciples with global partners

International Dinner

Celebrating the launch of the new Southern Asia Initiative

Speaker:

Rev. Dr. Mery Kolimon

Human rights activist and feminist theologian
Evangelical Church of West Timor (GMIT), Indonesia

Monday, 5:00 - 6:45 pm

Hilton Downtown Des Moines

Tickets available at ga.disciples.org for \$25

Exhibit

Open daily with opportunities to meet global partners,
mission co-workers, and Global Ministries staff

Workshops

Southern Asia Initiative Introduction

Sunday 3:00 - 4:30 pm

More workshops are listed at www.globalministries.org/GA2019

To see the full list of opportunities to engage with Global Ministries, global partners, and mission co-workers, go to
www.globalministries.org/GA2019



**Southern
Asia Initiative**





PRE-ASSEMBLY EVENTS

Get more out of your trip to Des Moines with these events prior to the General Assembly!

Doing and Denying Justice: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Social Justice

**Friday 9 am-5 pm
continuing Saturday 9 am-noon**

1 CEU offered by Phillips Theological Seminary, Iowa Event Center, \$75

Register via the General Assembly registration system.

Because of its origins, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) should have been at the forefront of resisting power structures with systemic injustices. Instead, this denomination born from the backlash against denominational structures in the 1800s found its informal polity prevented the church from becoming a strong voice on many social justice issues throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. However, at the local level, many individuals and churches found ways to use their collective voices for social justice either within the DOC church or with an affiliation to parachurch organizations. Join the Rev. Dr. Lisa Barnett as she leads an exploration of social justice issues from the 1800s to 2018 and how the CC (DOC) emerged as a strong public witness or faltered in its support of justice-making in the world.

Shine 2019

Saturday, 8:30 a.m. - noon

Offered by Disciples Church Extension Fund, Iowa Events Center, \$20

Registration is via disciplescef.org

Shine 2019 is designed to empower congregations to think differently about their use of space by showing trends, hearing stories, and creating space for creative thinking. Participants will leave with ideas of what they might achieve at **their church**.

Outcomes include:

- Participants will take a hard look at their building to see if they maximize space for mission
- A desire for congregations to connect with their community
- Participants will look at their worship space through fresh eyes
- Inspiration to achieve something within 28 days of the event

Clergy Retreat - Resilient Hearts, Leaders, Communities

Thursday - Saturday morning

Offered by Green Chalice of Disciples Home Missions at Wakonda Christian Church, 3938 Fleur Drive

Des Moines, IA 50321. \$50 (\$75 after April 2).

Register and find out more at the Green Chalice webpage: <https://www.discipleshomemissions.org/missions-advocacy/green-chalice/>

The price includes meals, space and program and **does not include housing**. Please contact us regarding scholarship or funding support. If you are interested contact Shardinnieri@gmail.com

This retreat is being facilitated by Green Chalice and is born out of a desire to equip and empower faith leaders in Creation Care and to explore compassion and sabbath as a practice. We see compassion, nonviolence and loving our neighbors as key to healing the many divides within the North American context. Special speakers include Rev. Dr. Christopher Carter and Dr. Seth Schoen.

Retreat Purpose:

- Build capacity for people and congregations to have difficult conversations.
- Offer sabbath space for clergy and faith leaders to explore a cross- generational approach to compassion building.
- Educate and empower one another in climate science, social justice and solutions
- To equip clergy and faith leaders with tools to remain healthy and sustainable

ALUMNI AND FRIENDS LUNCHEON

11:45 a.m. • Monday, July 22
Iowa Convention Center

Tickets: \$25 (per person)

REGISTER ONLINE AT
[HTTPS://GA.DISCIPLES.ORG](https://ga.disciples.org)



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For more information email maryann.morris@ptstulsa.edu or call 918.270.6464.

Pre-General Assembly Course... Doing and Denying Justice: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Social Justice

Friday, July 19, 9 a.m.–5 p.m. and
Saturday, July 20, 9 a.m.–noon.

1 CEU offered by Phillips Theological Seminary (\$75)

Join the Rev. Dr. Lisa Barnett as she leads a pre-General Assembly exploration of social justice issues from the 1800s to 2018 and how the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) emerged as a strong public witness or faltered in their support of justice-making in the world.

Register online: ga.disciples.org/education

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Disciples Justice Action

PROPHETIC PRESENCE



For DJAN activities at General Assembly:
www.call2justice.info



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for Justice

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Beloved Community

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www.disciplesjustice.net

D J A N





At CCH, we build and manage affordable housing where seniors live and thrive in the comfort of their own homes. With over 57 years of experience in housing development and property management, CCH has provided quality services to over 100,000 residents, many communities and their boards. Let us help you.

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Rev. Terri Owens , General Minister and President with CCH CEO Don Stump during community visit.

We are grateful for the opportunity to connect with churches and municipalities to realize a future where senior affordable housing is accessible for all who need it.

~ CCH CEO and President Don Stump



Get ready for Des Moines with Bible studies provided by Disciples from all over. And every one of them has a unique flavor and emphasis – just like Disciples! These are also available online at disciples.org/ga.

STUDY 1



Rev. Yakelin Santos

(This study is also available online in Spanish.)

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

(additional questions online)

1. 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.?
2. What concepts of this lesson in the sections About the Text and Reflections on the Text for Today have particularly caught your attention? Why?
3. 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?"



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STUDY 2

Miseon Choi, seminarian

(This study available unabridged online and in Korean.)

What was your first impression, when you read the passage of John 15:1-5? Perhaps, “I am the vine, you are the branches”, which is Jesus’ saying in the passage, is very familiar passage for us. This phrase was very familiar for me as well because this passage usually is popular for both Sunday School and sermons. And we only focus on bearing fruit. But I think it is a question about whether we are living well as the branches in the world because it is God’s work to bear fruit. If Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches, do I attach myself to the vine as a branch for nutrients? Also, do I accomplish the role of branch that send the nutrients to the other parts of the tree as bridge that connects between the vine and the fruit?

When someone asks us ‘who are you?’, we introduce ourselves by our name, nation, or our position. However, our priority identity should be “son of God and daughter of God”. What is the role of ‘branches’ and ‘son and daughter of God’? We all have to be more like Jesus, who is Christ. The word ‘Christ’ comes from the Greek word ‘Χριστός (Christos)’. It means ‘anointed one’ in Greek and Messiah (מָשִׁיחַ), ‘one who is anointed’ in Hebrew. In the Gospel of Mark 1:1, Jesus is identified as Christ, the Son

of God. In addition, when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, a voice came from the heaven, “You are my Son” (John 1:11). That is when he decided to live according to God’s will, he could finally be able to begin his ministry as the Son of God and anointed one. Like Jesus, we should become ‘Christ’ and ‘son and daughter of God’. In other words, we have to be Miseon Christ, Annie Christ, Charles Christ, and (your name) Christ. Anyone who sees us must be able to see Jesus in us and through us.

When the branch abides in the vine, it can fulfill its role as a bridge that bears fruit. Here, we need the definition of fruit. Jesus says in John 15:10, “If you keep my [Father’s] commandments, you will abide in my love”. And the commandment is that as Jesus has loved us, we should “love one another” (vv.12, 17). The only way that we live as ‘branches’, ‘son and daughter of God’, and ‘Christ’, and someone can see Jesus Christ through us is to “LOVE ONE ANOTHER”.

Sometimes we desire higher position, honor, or authority. We often envy those who have them. We are sometimes thirsty for people’s attention and want to be more respected by others. Paul, however, says in 1 Corinthians 12:28-31, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?” We all have different position and its role. But Paul says to “strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way”.

And he continues to say that if we do everything without love that is nothing in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. In other words, love is the greater gift, and the excellent way (1 Cor 12:31). The only way that we love one another is to abide in Jesus. That is what the branches should do. When we love one another, Jesus’ joy may be in us, and our joy may be complete (John 15:11).

Then, how could we love one another? The Samaritan who did not have higher position and social power like Levites and priest had a greater loving mind. The Samaritan was regarded as worthless and trivial than Levites and priest. However, the Samaritan saved a half-dead person as ‘son and daughter of God’ and ‘Christ’. The Samaritan spent his/her time, energy, and money, which as much as he/she can, in order to do what the half-dead person really needs. The way the Samaritan loves has many suggestions for our community today. We often cannot live as the ‘branches’ because of prejudice that comes from different culture, race/ethnicity, gender, social class, and position. Jesus, the Son of God and Christ, sacrificed himself and loves all people. He shows love through action and life. I hope and pray that we may love our family, friends, community, and further our neighbor with action and truth, so that we may be more like Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Amen.





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STUDY 3

Rev. Ike Nicholson

Session in a sentence: Jesus calls us to stay connected with him. The fruit we bear is because of Jesus. In that is divine joy.

The command:

What are some words or phrases that speak to you? How would you explain “Abide in Me” to a counselor? A construction worker? A nurse? A truckdriver? A police officer? A farmer?

Few people use the word “abide” in everyday language. In all of the works of Shakespeare, the word “abide” is used 47 times. The King James Version of the Bible uses it 103 times, 45 of those times in the New Testament. If it is true that words are ways to help the human mind visualize concepts, how did those early Christians understand what Jesus was saying?

In the original language of the text, the word translated as “abide” simply means “to stay, remain.” The Contemporary English Version translates the word, “joined.” That helps, especially given the metaphor Jesus gives us. Jesus calls himself the vine and his disciples the branches. The purpose of the branches is to “bear fruit.” It seems reasonable enough that branches that bear fruit are most commonly “joined” to the “vine.” This would be a pretty good way to explain to a rural culture the relationship Jesus wants with us, especially to those who tended vineyards.

What about people in other walks of life? Law enforcement and military say, “On me.” That means “stay close, your life may depend on it.” Tradesman and coaches say, “Stick with me, kid, and you’ll learn something.” That means,

“Pay attention and you, too, can learn this skill.” A professional guide tells her hikers, “Don’t wander off, you might get lost.”

“Abide in me,” Jesus says. “On me,” “stick with me,” “don’t wander off,” our life, our eternal life, depends on it. Our faith, our hope, is in Jesus alone.

What a minute. What is “fruit?”

Fruit is a familiar metaphor both in Scripture and in our culture. For the Apostle Paul, the fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). There’s nothing wrong with that, but that doesn’t fit the context of Jesus’ teaching. This passage in John is a part of the Passion narrative that takes us through the crucifixion and ends with the post-resurrection experiences. In the context of John, what is fruit? John suggests at least two potential meanings of “fruit.” First, we are called to love others as we have been loved by Jesus (v. 9). When we “abide” in Christ, we are able to love. Conversely, the absence of love in our lives could be an indicator that we are already “withering.” If we love Jesus, we will love others. If we do not love others, we are withering. Second, we are called to make disciples. In John 4:36, we read,

“The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.” Sounds like John 15:11, doesn’t it? If we are not making disciples, if we are not calling others into a relationship with Jesus Christ, we are withering.

Practices:

Jesus gives us clear ways to stay connected when he says, “...my words abide in you” (v. 7a). When Scripture is a regular and significant part of our daily life we are being fed. We will bear fruit. “Ask,” (v. 7b) pray expecting that God hears and answers. “Keep my commandments,” (v. 9) reminds us of John 13:34. And finally, “that my (Jesus’) joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (v. 11) is a testimony of a life centered in the sufficiency and supremacy of Jesus the Messiah.

Voices from the Past: “As genuine disciples of Jesus, therefore, let us also lift up our eyes and see the fields that have been sown by Moses and the prophets...how it is possible to reap their fruit to eternal life.” Origen (c.184-253), Commentary on the Gospel of John

The question?

Don’t tell me what to do!

I’ll think about it.

Yes Ma’am/Sir.



Where are you on the scale? Jesus doesn’t threaten us. He only speaks about the natural result of not heeding his words. Without fruit, the branch is useless to the purpose of the plant. If it doesn’t bear fruit, there’s something already wrong. The “withering” is not a threat but simply a statement of the natural result of separating ourselves from Jesus. “Abide in me,” Jesus says. “But, why?” Jesus’ answer is stark. If we don’t stay connected to him, we will wither and die.

Is my spiritual walk with Jesus withering? Is my community withering? The health of a branch is measured by the fruit it produces.



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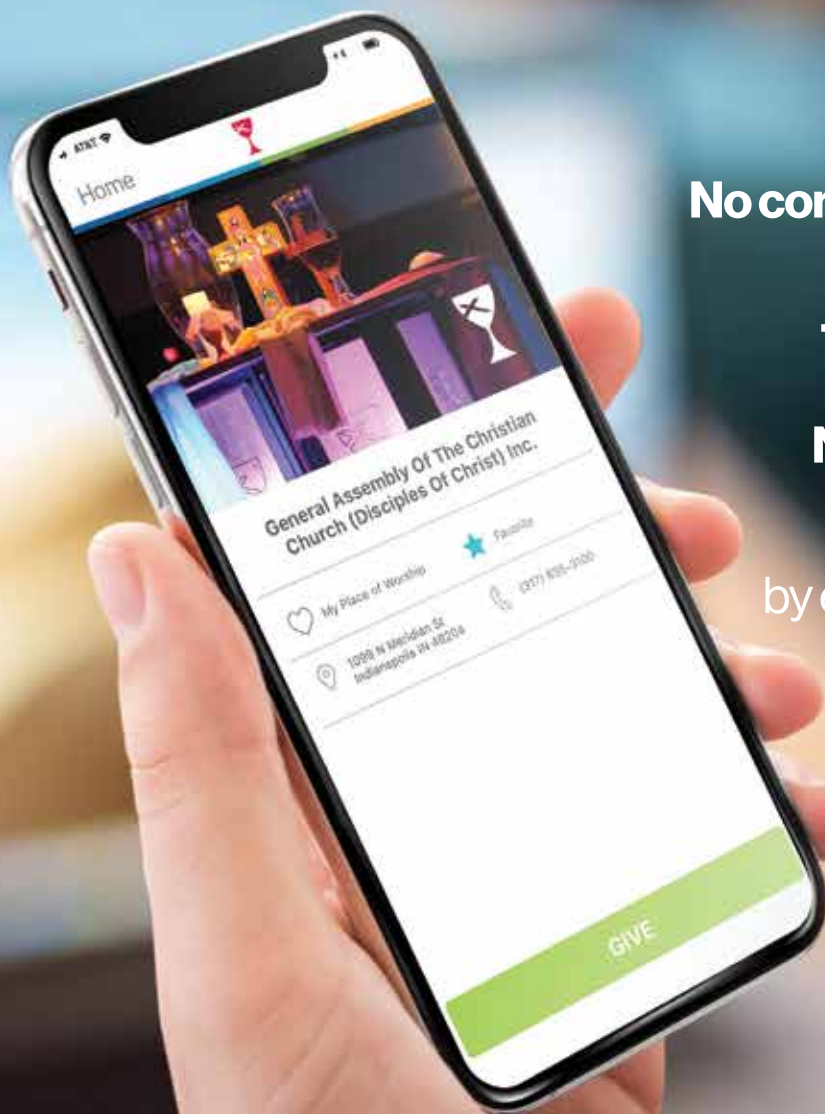
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STUDY 4

Riley Jones, law student

(A link to the video referenced is available online.)

My father always said that fear is simply a gauge of one's capacity to overcome a challenge. As I've gotten older, that has only become clearer. Fear is an emotion that keeps us on our toes while we await whatever may come next. While we all have an instinctual sense of our limits, there are times when those limits—or at least our conception of them—stand in the way of truly basking in the richness of the world God has given us. Instinct tells us to avoid the unknown. God calls us to receive the unknown with his guidance. This is especially true when we are called to embrace other identities, cultures and perspectives that are different our own.

Abiding in God's promise in spite of our fear of the unknown requires courage. In the 20th Century, Black Americans displayed much of this type of courage. One man, in particular, exemplified this phenomenon very well. He was well-educated, having done graduate work in theology. As pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church he challenged his congregation to be vigilant in the face of a blatantly oppressive system. He even went as far to suggest that Black folks in Montgomery should boycott the segregation of the bus system. No, his name was not Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In fact, Rev. Vernon Johns is a relatively obscure personality in the telling of civil rights history.

Rev. Johns was born in the wake of the Reconstruction era in Virginia. After finishing at Oberlin College, he studied theology at the University of Chicago. When he arrived to

the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, he was well received because of his education, but started to ruffle feathers as he settled into his pastoral role. "The Road to Freedom: The Vernon Johns Story," written and produced by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and James Earl Jones captures this well. A senior deacon at Dexter Avenue had been intent on giving Rev. Johns a hard time because of disagreement with his approach to the question of racial equality. Deacon Hill felt that Rev. Johns was too assertive, perhaps even too dangerous for the well-established congregation to follow him completely. It was, however, after Deacon Hill took the time to listen with an open heart to Rev. Johns reasoning that he was swayed to believe that he too had the power to confront racism. This comes to a climax when Deacon Hill sees the Montgomery Police department abusing its power and decides to confront them, which ultimately results in his death. The sermon that Vernon Johns preaches in honor of the fallen Deacon Hill is instructive for all of us.

He begins, "Brother Hill found a cause worth dying for. I envy him. Like Moses, he was a peaceful man who saw something that so horrified him that he was compelled to act." Deacon Hill channeled his energy, not inwardly to fuel his own cowardice, but rather extended himself to another human being in his time of need.

In Exodus we see Moses struggling with being chosen to deliver his people from Egypt, conversing with God saying, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" And with that simple and profound command,

Moses began a journey that delivered the Israelites from their suffering. It was Moses' ability to abide in God's promise which turned his fear of into fear for. Rev. Johns understood this feeling and called his congregation to act; for that he was removed and cast aside, never to be heard from again.

Rev. Johns finishes his sermon by highlighting the lessons to be learned from the crucifixion of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, saying that he "spoke the words that transformed a lynching into a crucifixion, that made Jesus not a condemner but a redeemer. He said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'" For those of us who have the blessings of education and of opportunity, we know our responsibility to speak on behalf of those who need us. Silence in light of the systematic mistreatment of God's children—whatever the form—contravenes our ability to truly abide. Rev. Johns knew this. He did not speak up for his own self-gratification, but rather for those that would come after him. His disruption of the status quo paved the way for a young preacher to start a movement that changed the world. We all have the power to do the same.

Questions to Ponder:

1. What horrifies you?
2. What things in our world are so deeply perturbing that they keep us awake at night?
3. What are we afraid of? Who are we afraid for?
4. In viewing the video clip on Vernon Jones, how does he teach us what it means to abide?
5. What does it mean to abide in light of fear? What does it mean to abide despite fear?





GOOD TIMES!

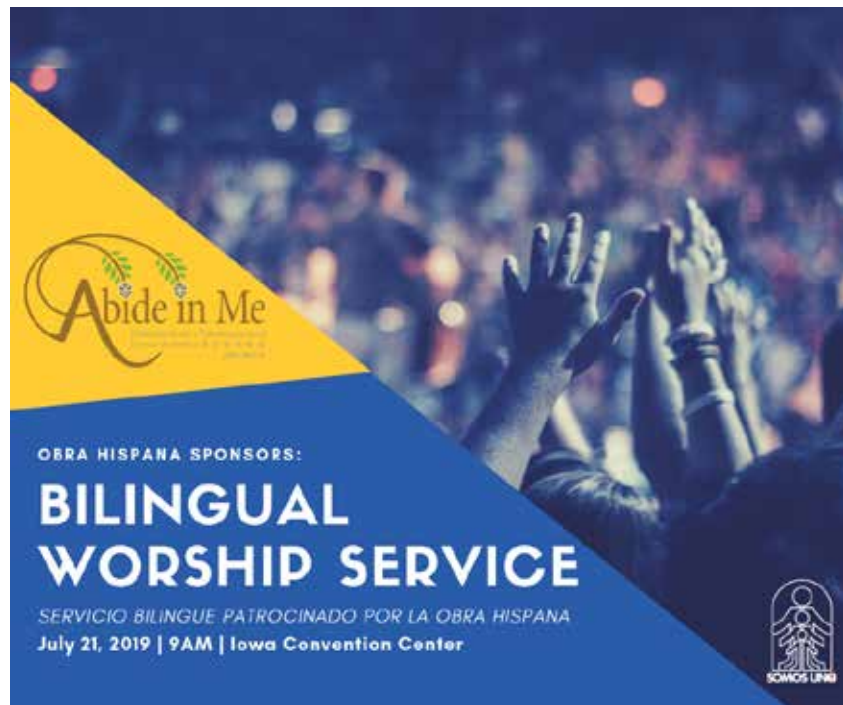
The Upper Midwest Region is excited to host the General Assembly and show off their Midwest hospitality. The Local Arrangements Committee (LAC) has been meeting for more than a year to make sure you have the best experience possible.

Besides the full slate of mission opportunities and gathering volunteers for registration, communion and other hospitality, the LAC is sponsoring some additional fun and offers some suggestions for other things to do. You can get the details on the "Good Times" page on disciples.org/ga

- Yoga on the Riverfront
- Bike rides
- Farmers Market meet up
- East Village scavenger hunt
- Brew tour

And here's a bonus! The Iowa State Fair's butter carving champ is a Disciple. She has offered to create a butter Chalice for display next to MissionFest in the exhibit hall. After years of creating butter cows, this chalice should be a piece of cake!

Promote the 2019 General Assembly in Des Moines with worship materials, graphics and video found at disciples.org/ga/promotion.



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STUDY 5

Rev. Dr. Donald K. Gillett, II

The Gilletts at one point had two dogs, a turtle, a fishbowl, a 55-gallon fish tank and four kids all sharing space. Sharing space, making room for others and thinking about the needs of those who inhabit and breathe deeply the air you share is a way of being with others. It is not necessarily a way of abiding with others.

While the act of sharing, the act of giving oneself, can be accomplished in deep and meaningful ways, it does not fully grasp the deeply theological concept of abiding. To “abide” is to enter a relationship through one’s connection and relationship with God. For the believer, Jesus has come and abides with us from the moment of new birth – that moment we believed and confessed Christ as our savior. The Greek word $\kappa\alpha\tau\omicron\iota\chi\epsilon\iota$ (menē) “to abide” and its derivatives can be conveyed as “to be present, to remain, to dwell, to be kept, to tarry, to stand and/or to remain.”

To abide, in my view, is in a theological sense to bring God-Thought, God-Love, and God-Compassion to one’s relationships. In John 15 there are numerous references to the word “abide.” The meanings range from “to remain,” “to dwell,” “to tarry,” and “to stand.” The structure of the cross reminds me of this abiding relationship. The vertical

bar symbolizes God in us and us in God. This is the act of staying, the act of abiding. The horizontal bar symbolizes again the abiding relationship with all of God’s creation-both the believer and the non-believer. Abiding in God-Thought; God-Love; and God-Compassion means to be present, to tarry, to dwell with God and with those who share space with us. We are holding them and their burdens close. They hold us and our burdens as well.

Some may find it difficult to abide when they are the one wronged or demonized by others who profess God’s love. Some may find it difficult to abide when they see someone hurting. Feeling the hurt of others and empathizing with their painful reality creates difficulty.

In this era of dismay, disillusionment, division and despair, it is time not only to share space with those around us; it is time to abide and share God. It is time to peel back the layers of bad theology, spiritual hurt, church pain and learn to abide with one another. It is now time to realize that I cannot truly abide in God and God in me if I choose not to abide with those who suffer, are mistreated, or even disagree with me. It is time to abide. Abiding in Christ and Christ abiding in us produces life changing power. It is time to abide in God, God’s love and one another. God creates more than spaces for us to bear fruit.

Reflection

1. How do you define “abiding”?
2. How are you abiding in the ongoing relationship with God and humanity?
3. In light of the suffering we find in our communities, in what ways can you abide in God-thought; God-Love; and God-Consideration with humanity?
4. In what ways is the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) called to abide in God? Within our respective church? And with others?
5. To abide in God is to worship, and it is displayed through feelings and actions. If I abide in God, God’s word and in God’s Love: What should my outer actions look like?
6. What are three ways to deepen your abiding - relationship with God? afraid for?
4. In viewing the video clip on Vernon Jones, how does he teach us what it means to abide?
5. What does it mean to abide in light of fear? What does it mean to abide despite fear?





VOTING REPRESENTATIVES

Voters will be credentialed on site at the registration area.

From the Design of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

38. All members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who register for the General Assembly shall have all privileges of the Assembly, except that voting privileges shall be limited to the following:

- a.** Voting representatives from congregations. Each congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) shall be entitled to have two voting representatives, plus one additional voting representative for each 100 participating members, or major fraction thereof, over the first 100. These voting representatives from congregations shall be in addition to persons holding standing in the Order of Ministry.
- b.** Voting representatives from regions. Each region shall be entitled to have a minimum of three voting representatives for the first 1,000 members, as stated in the most recent Yearbook. In addition, each region may have an additional representative for each 1,000 participating members, or major fraction thereof, within the region. These voting representatives from regions shall be in addition to persons holding standing in the Order of Ministry. The

voting representatives from each region shall include women and men, persons of varied racial or ethnic backgrounds, young adults ages 18 to 30, and youth under the age of 18.

- c.** Ministers. Persons holding standing in the Order of Ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), in accordance with the policies and criteria established by the General Assembly through its General Commission on Ministry.
- d.** Exceptions. Members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) not otherwise voting members, who are the chief administrative officers of institutions of higher education and general ministries that are recognized by the General Assembly; members of the General Board not otherwise voting members; and former Moderators and Vice Moderators not otherwise voting members.

39. Voting members of the General Assembly shall serve from the beginning of one General Assembly to the beginning of the next General Assembly. No person shall have more than one vote in the General Assembly, and no person shall vote in absentia or by proxy. Congregations and regions may name alternates to replace voting representatives provided for by paragraphs 38(a) and 38(b) who are unable to attend.

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STUDY 6

Rev. Dr. Cynthia Lindner

During my two decades as an Oregon pastor, a grateful resident of the abundant Willamette Valley, and a novice (though enthusiastic) gardener, I acquired a healthy respect for the exuberant vitality of vines. From the well-disciplined beauty and delectable productivity of the Willamette Valley vineyards, to the morning glory vines that volunteered delicate blue-sky trumpets in places they hadn't been invited, to the wild blackberry vines whose advance was as impossible to halt as their fruit was impossible to resist, the valley's vines were famous not only for their beauty and sweetness, but also for their tenacity and their intransigence.

Perhaps, then, it should come as no surprise that in the midst of dinner on one of the darkest nights of their lives--on the eve of his betrayal, trial, and crucifixion-- Jesus reminds his disciples that they would do well to take a lesson from our verdant partners in creation. When Jesus meets their present crisis by invoking the example of the vines that have delighted and daunted us for generations, he was offering so much more than poetic platitudes or the cheap assurance that all would be well, by and by. Jesus wasn't soothing his friends with promises of better days, nor coaching them to cling to the memories of happier times past: in fact, he rejects these familiar refuges of fair-weather faith. Instead, Jesus meets his friends' fear of abandonment and failure with a sturdy assertion of God's power and their own: "Abide in me as I abide in you."

Here, Jesus is not making a suggestion or issuing an invitation; rather, Jesus is proclaiming—that is, he is proactively claiming them as his own, as his home, as vital extensions of an

indefatigable divine vine. He "abides" in them—that is, his life is their life, his vitality is their vitality, his power is their power, his love is their love. In first century Palestine, the idea that friends and family shared actual life and power in this very visceral way was commonplace. If you shared a meal with someone, accepted his hospitality, ate her bread and drank her wine, then your lives and your loyalty were bound together forever: you had consumed one another's substance, mingled your spirits, and were responsible for each other's welfare. "Abide in me as I abide in you..." wasn't an invitation to climb into Jesus' lap and be comforted. Rather, it was a bracing reminder of who and whose these disciples were, of what they would become, and for whom: "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

That Jesus' disciples then and now should "abide" in resurrection's own power—that we, like those verdant, vibrant vines, might sink our roots deep, stretch our branches far, and bear flowers and fruit with courage and tenacity—is our legacy and our true purpose. It is a promise already given; but one that is largely unheeded and unclaimed by the church, even after two thousand years of practice. We have built "abodes," to be sure—empires and nations, denominations and congregations and buildings—we have secured our own survival, and comforted ourselves with all the trappings of faithfulness. But all of our making and doing has not yet plumbed the deep meaning or true power of "abide"—which cannot be exhausted by our beliefs or confined in our buildings, because "abide" is not a noun, but a verb—an exuberant, intransigent, vine-like way of being, growing, living and loving every day. In the first eight verses

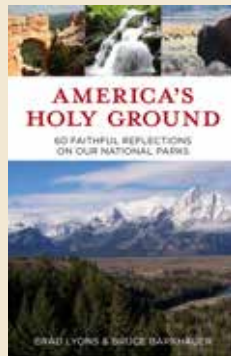
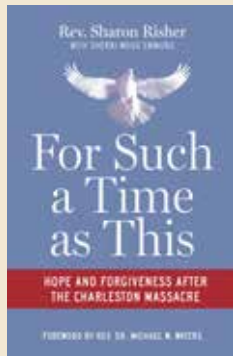
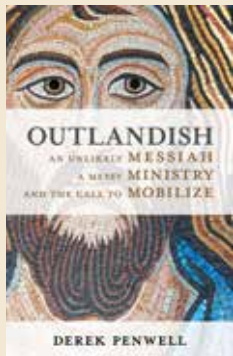
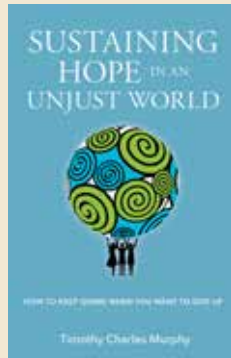
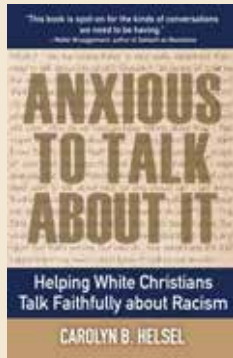
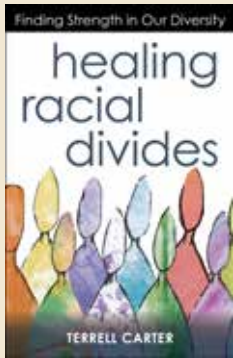
of John 15, the word "abide" appears eight times, while the words "bear fruit" are repeated six times: the two are integrally connected. "Abiding" is not something we do for, or to, ourselves: "abiding" is living the risen life of Christ in every moment that is ours, in our hearts and homes, our communities and congregations, not for our own benefit or blessedness, but for the sole purpose of bearing fruit for the sake of the world God so loves.

What does it mean to "abide" in our times, to bear fruit for the sake of the world? Perhaps it means getting over ourselves-- embracing the fact that we are not given to the world for our own enrichment, that we are not our own. Perhaps it means rooting ourselves confidently in the power of God's love rather than shrinking in fear from one another. Perhaps it means escaping the pots and plots that have become too small for the vitality and vibrancy of the gospel, opening our church doors not only so that others might enter but that we might "branch out" into our neighborhoods and communities, blooming where we are not expected, reaching into untended lots and hearts with the sweet fruits of human solidarity and heavenly companionship, breaking out the bread and wine of the resurrection life and setting a table for all who cross our paths.

- Whose are you, and to whom do you belong? Who or what is your vine, your rootedness, your identity? Where do your power and vitality come from?
- What does it mean for you to "live Christ's resurrection life" here and now?
- What is your community hungry for?
- What is the fruit you bear on behalf of the world?



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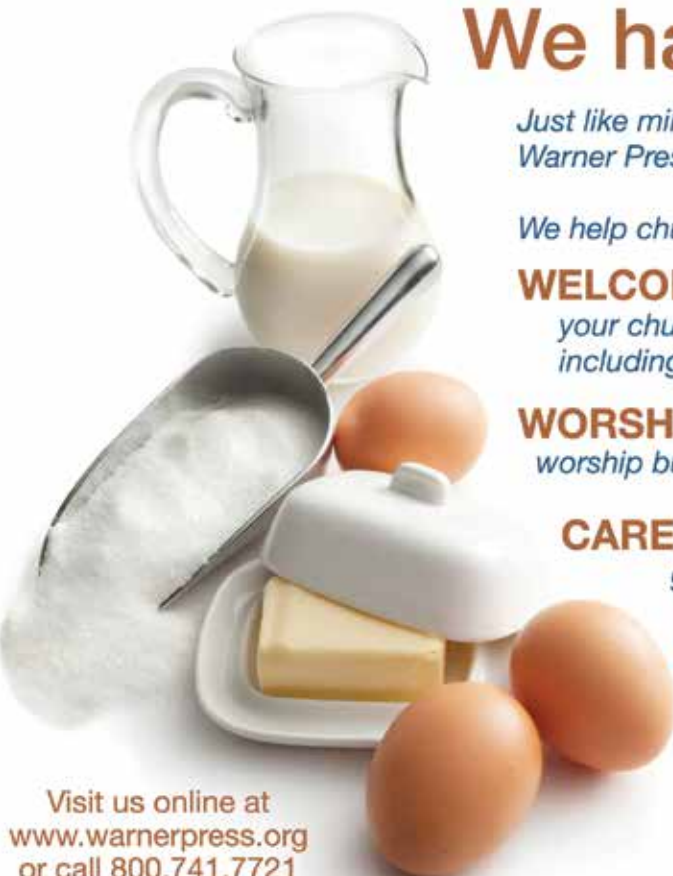
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STUDY 7

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 addressed 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' *agapē* and we shall abide each other by this *agapē*. In time of crisis, it is this type of love that unites 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 *agapē*? 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 those who have been put aside in the margins of our society is how we show Jesus' *agapē*. 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 *agapē* 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?

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

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



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General Assembly Schedule

- Peter Marty, Publisher of the Christian Century, the Peter Ainslie and Forrest Reed Lecture on “Christian Faith and Public Engagement for the Common Good” — Tuesday evening banquet co-hosted with CCU — Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry
- Tuesday night of General Assembly — The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) At Fifty: Reflections on The Merger Agreement and The Design: Where Do We Go From Here?
- Panel discussion: The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) at Fifty: Reflections on the Merger Agreement and The Design: Where Do We Go From Here?
- The Joe and Nancy Stalcup Workshop on Congregational History: Storytelling —

connect your faith story with our core Disciples identity — Rebecca Anderson, Gilead Church Chicago

- “Make Disciples History: an oral history project” — record your stories of how your church makes a difference in your life and in the world

The following book will also be available:

“Seeking God’s Design: Disciples’ Quest for Unity and Wholeness” (Chalice Press and Disciples of Christ Historical Society) — interviews with the men and women who led the “restructure” of the Disciples movement into the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and reflections from key church leaders and thinkers today as we move into our second half-century as a denomination.



STUDY 8

Rev. Dr. Paul Carpenter

With clear imagery and repetition, Jesus reveals that the most important factor to our life is to remain, tarry, stay, and continue “in” Christ. Throughout the New Testament we see that union with the Lord Jesus Christ is the gift of God through which He offers all things in this life and in the next. In John 15, Jesus reminds us that the same Gospel that saves us is the Gospel that grows us – abiding in Him. My initial concern and question is “How? How do I remain in Him?” The pragmatist in me wants to cry out “pray, attend worship services, seek justice, tell the world about Jesus.” Those things are good fruit, but this passage is concerned with the root. After all, our effort, morals, and striving didn’t save us in the first place; how can that be the answer to the basis of our relationship with God through Jesus?

In this passage Jesus offers three persons. He is the true vine, with true fruit, and real life. The Father is the vinedresser who freely approaches and works the branches. We are the tender, flexible shoots designed with one purpose – to display the fruit of the vine to the world. God offers us this unique relationship wherein we are intimately united with Jesus, and the Father prunes, cleans, and removes from us undesirable elements.

“To the glory of God the Father” is the aim of God’s Gospel. The presence of fruit glorifies God. The fruit (Fruit of the Spirit, Obedience, Gospel-spreading, Faithful waiting) is the

native produce of the true vine, Jesus Christ. As branches we aren’t involved, but we are graciously included. The only root factor that will count and generate lasting results is our union with God’s only begotten Son, Jesus. “Abide in me.”

John 15:2 startles me. Logically I understand that the presence of holy fruit is the marker of a holy root and connection with Jesus. No fruit, no root, cut it off! Additionally God’s freedom to prune, clean, and purify those who remain in Christ as a process to maximize His glory and renown is biblically consistent. I still question though, “What do I need to do in order to be pruned and not cut off?!” The reason I am startled initially is because v.2 comes before v.3. In an instant Jesus washes over His church, His beloved with a Gospel word: “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”

Each time we open the scriptures we must decide if we are to read by the power of the Gospel or of the Law. The Law is what we do; the Gospel is what God does. Instead of asking “What do I need to DO?” John 15 can first be read by asking “What do I need to BEHOLD that has been done on my behalf?” The Father sent Jesus into this world for impure, unclean, unfruitful people. By God’s freedom we are declared clean by Him speaking His word over us. Even though we are found impure, but credited as though clean through our union with the only sinless One, Jesus Christ, God still purifies us over time until we step into His Kingdom.

How then do we remain, tarry, and

abide in Christ and Him in us? By the perseverance of God’s Spirit in His Son’s mighty name and for God’s glory. John 15:3 echoes John 3:3, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Colossians 3:1-4 – Jesus has not come to enhance our lives, but to replace them. We become new creations, born again. Our longing for God, our yearning for Christ’s fruit to be displayed, and our affections for God’s glory to be heralded are signs and assurances that we are a truly regenerated people.

God will be glorified and in the end it will not be based on our effort, but on Christ’s sufficiency, and His determination that He will have a holy people. We are alive to display His fruit, not ours. “Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord’” 1 Corinthians 1:31.

- How often do you preach the Gospel to yourself – that we are justified by faith in Jesus and not by works?
- Where did your desire for God come from?
- How have you witnessed God connecting people to Jesus through you? How does God show Jesus to the world through your life?
- Are you experiencing God’s hand taking parts of you away? Do you trust God to be a good vinedresser? How has God treated you in the past?
- If continuing in Christ is up to God’s sovereignty and not our effort, how does this motivate us?
- I’ve heard it said “In Jesus, we have our verdict before our performance.” What are your thoughts?



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