

“Stay With Me”

John 15:9-17

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Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love; just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lays down his life for his friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

You did not choose me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in my name He may give to you.

This I command you, that you love one another.

ABIDING: First Century Palestine

I am one of the ones he chose, one he calls friend. Actually the word 'friend' doesn't really capture it because what he really means is I, Andrew, am one of the beloved ones.

We are with him. We stay with him all the time, except when he needs to be alone. We have gotten so close, all of us, we cannot imagine life without him.

For me, it all began about three years ago. I was out in the wilderness south of town, drawn out there by the preaching of that wild-

eyed John, God rest his soul. John was impossible to miss, in his crazy camel hair shirt. But there was another one that day, a Rabbi. I couldn't help but notice him. For one thing, John kept pointing to him with his long, bony finger.

It all began with a simple question. "What do you want?" the Rabbi said. I stammered something, can't remember exactly what. But I will never forget his reply. He looked at me. Straight through to my heart. "Come, and you will see."

It hit me like a ton of bricks. I had no choice, really. It's been that way all along. When he told us to come, we had to come. He's been saying "stay with me" ever since.

Course I got my brother involved. Had to. It was just too compelling to keep it to myself. There was a magnetism about him, to be sure, but it was more than that. There were the miracles, too, lots of them, but it was much more than those.

We were chosen. We weren't looking for him, you see; he picked us to be with him. From the very beginning we all had the feeling it wasn't going to be easy. From the very beginning it felt like we were jumping off a cliff into the dark and we had no idea where or how we were going to land. But we also knew there was something about him that was so important, so real, so fundamental, we simply couldn't walk away. We had to stay.

Which brings us to now. He's getting ready to leave us, you know. We've been talking about it among ourselves. He's been pretty straight with us about what's going to happen to him. We've stayed with him this long; we're scared. We don't know how it's going to end up. All we know is we have to stay. We have to stay, because we love him. Because we were chosen to stay with him, to be more like him, to love others the way he's showed us how to love.

It's a love that has no boundaries, a love that doesn't discriminate. It's a love that abides---I love that word, abide. To stay, to remain, to wait, to hang in there. Abiding.

All I know is this. I have to stay. And even though he will leave us here, we know we will not be alone. We know because he promised to be with us, to stay with us, somehow, some way, even after he's gone.

ABIDING: Twenty-first Century Los Angeles

It was the winter of 2005. I was out looking for a story. I saw him playing a violin over at Pershing Square. He looked so cool out there playing. It looked like just a nice piece of city life that day. The music

was so beautiful I just sat and watched for a while. It was the beginning of a long and wonderful relationship.¹

I write for the LA Times. I will never forget meeting Nathaniel that day in Pershing Square, under Beethoven's shadow. That's why he was there, in that particular square, because of Beethoven. As I moved closer to this man making such beautiful music, I saw his violin only had two strings. Two strings with such amazing sound. I couldn't help myself. I was drawn to him.

He looked funky in his multilayered, mismatched clothing and his funny hat. There was a wildness about him, a sort of otherworldliness. He was homeless; that was obvious.

One of the first things he said to me when I met him was, "I've had a few setbacks." "Me, too." I replied.

Nathaniel had dropped out of Julliard and now he was on the streets. At first I thought about Nathaniel as one more story in a city of millions. I wanted to find out how this once promising prodigy wound up living in tunnels and doorways.

Then I started to get involved. I began staying with him. I had met a man who was down on his luck. A man with an amazing gift. I thought I might be able to help him. Help him get back on his feet. Get off the streets. Help him get some mental health services, some medicine. Help him get back into his music.

I thought I could help him. But as I got to know him, as I stayed with him, what happened was that he helped me.

Witnessing his courage, his humility, and the power of his art changed me. Becoming his friend, staying with him, abiding with him, changed me.

ABIDING: The Multicultural Church

Today the Presbyterian Church celebrates what it calls multicultural Sunday. Hard to know exactly what that means, but I have a sneaking suspicion it has something to do with abiding. Being with people, loving people, accepting people as people and not as some sort of category. Abiding does not mean we all get blended together, losing our individuality, so we end up looking like a mocha latte. Abiding means we come together and we enjoy how we are different as well as how we are the same! Abiding means we learn from one another. We help each other.

¹ The words of Steve Lopez on the website www.soloistmovie.com. Paraphrased.

On their website, the PCUSA says the a multicultural church:

- preaches the good news to all
- embraces diversity
- reflects diversity in worship
- shares power
- hosts strangers and aliens
- breaks barriers of race and fear

When you look at this list, I think you will agree that we are well on our way to being a multicultural church. We have church members who have come to the U.S. from at least seven different countries. Our CDC staff includes several teachers born outside the U.S. from three different countries. We host a congregation of immigrants from Ethiopia every Sunday. Their fellowship is a community of Christians we hope to get to know better and to do ministry with over the coming years.

The creativity and interests of our music director have provided much diversity in worship music and style. Though the diversity can be a little disconcerting for some, it enlarges us and reminds us of who we are---global Christians in an increasingly global world.

Our Arts Camp, the brainchild of our programs director, welcomes and cares for children outside our circle, some of whom are culturally different from us. Our After School Mission will do the same.

I continue to be impressed and humbled by how well you welcome the stranger, how you open your arms to care for those in need. Time and again I see evidence of your generosity and your accepting spirit.

Friends, what we have here is abiding love. It's a love that has no boundaries. It's a love that doesn't discriminate. It's a love that stays, remains, waits, hangs in there. AND, we know we are not alone in this. We know because he promised to be with us, to stay with us, somehow, some way, abiding.