

5 Easter Yr B, 6/05/2012
Jn 15:1-8
Rev. Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson, Chaplain,
The Good Samaritan Society's South Ridge Village,
Medicine Hat, Alberta

“Abide in Jesus”

We live in a very disposable world. Our world is temporary, subject to constant changes. In previous generations, many people could pretty much depend on things like job security, and work at one, perhaps two jobs for their whole working life. Today most people will have worked at many jobs before they retire. Companies that boast of record profits this year may very well be bankrupt next year. Years ago, a lot of our household items such as televisions, stoves, fridges and irons lasted a long time. Today the quality of such household items is much poorer, and the life-expectancy is way lower. The same is true of larger price tag items such as automobiles. Twenty or thirty years ago, vehicles lasted much longer than the ones today. The same is true in the world of technology.

Computers become outdated quite soon, if you have a computer for five years, that's considered a long time. Recently my wife was shopping for a new cell phone. We inquired about several of the new android phones. In conversation with the sales clerk, I asked how long these new high tech phones last. He told me that his lasted a little over a year, then he bought a new one. I then asked him if the old ones were thrown away or recycled. He didn't know, but admitted that he threw his old one away.

We live in a very disposable world. Even human relationships have become more disposable. Far too many people are treated as if they are disposable—in the workplace, in marriages, in families, and yes, even in the life of the church. How sad and tragic!

In stark contrast to our disposable society, there is good news in today's gospel. Jesus gives us a better, healthier way of living. Speaking in

parabolic language, he tells us: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the winegrower. 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.” How true this is of the natural world. For example, in our back yard we have several long branches hanging over onto our property from our neighbour’s huge willow tree. We don’t complain about these branches because they provide shade for us during those scorching hot summer days. However, there is a downside to these overhanging branches. Whenever a high wind comes up, usually branches will break off of the tree and fall onto our lawn. So come springtime, I’m out there picking up a lot of dead branches. Those branches, once they fall off the tree, lose their connection with their life source—thus they soon become dead branches. So too it is for us, Jesus tells us that unless we abide; unless we remain connected and joined with him we will wither and die spiritually, if not in other ways too. We will no longer be productive. So abiding, remaining connected, joining together with, being united to Jesus is vital to our health and salvation.

We abide in Jesus through the means of grace: his word, the sacraments, the communion of saints worshipping and fellowshiping together, prayer, and engaging in practical acts of loving-kindness. We abide together, not on our own. Together as branches abiding, connecting with Jesus and one another we remain fruitful, healthy and strong.

God’s love is powerful indeed, but it is not an isolated entity. God’s love is revealed in the midst of human community, present in our joys and sorrows. When we act in love for one another, even simple gestures can be vehicles for God’s presence.

Terry Waite, the Anglican Church representative who was held hostage in Beirut, Lebanon for 1,763 days, was in the thoughts and prayers of people around the world throughout his captivity. On the second anniversary of Terry’s kidnapping, when it was not even certain that he

was still alive, a woman in Bedford, England, acted in faith. In doing so, she made a big difference in Terry's life.

Joy Brodier got a postcard and wrote these words on it: "People everywhere are praying for you and are working for your release and the release of the other hostages." She then put a special stamp on the postcard. It was a beautiful stamp of the great religious leader, John Bunyan, who, during captivity in prison, wrote the classic work of faith, *Pilgrim's Progress*. She hoped that her words and the stamp would inspire Terry.

Her husband kidded her about how she expected Terry would get her postcard. She thought for a moment and then wrote these words of address: "Terry Waite, c/o Hezbollah (Party of God), Beirut, Lebanon." The next day, she mailed the postcard. Then she waited, along with others around the world. For nearly 1,000 days she waited, then the good news came: Terry Waite had been freed by his captors and was en route home to England.

When he stepped off the plane in London, Terry said he wanted to thank the person who had sent him the beautiful postcard with the stained-glass window on it. That was Joy's postcard. It turned out that it was the only piece of mail Terry received in those 1,763 days. While the Red Cross received bundles of mail for Terry, they did not know how to reach him. For some unknown reason, Joy's postcard was the only mail to actually get through to Terry.

When Terry went to Bedford to meet with Joy, he thanked her for her simple act of kindness that had made such a difference in his life.¹

So, may we abide in Jesus our true vine and be his faithful branches by bearing much fruit—spreading his love here and around the globe. Amen.

¹ *Emphasis: A Preaching Journal for the Parish Pastor*, Vol. 24, No. 1, May-June 1994 (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Co., Inc.), p. 14.