

2021 THEME

"ABIDE: STAYING CONNECTED"

"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father. -John 15:1-8 (NLT)

This year's theme is "Abiding: Staying Connected." Those of you who were present on our church's zoom meeting, I am sure that you recognize the change in what we discussed. We discussed the "Rooted" as this year's theme. But if there is one thing that 2020 has taught us it is that life is unpredictable and filled with swift transition. With that in mind I believe God's word for us this coming year is "Abide."

Abiding is the idea of continuing without change. It is remaining faithful and steadfast as we trust in the providence, provision and the protection of God. Life in general and 2020 in particular has affirmed that things can shift and circumstances will change, but our commitment and connection to God through Jesus Christ should remain unwavering no matter our circumstances. I know, this is easier said than done. But in order to live an abundant and fulfilled life, we must be determined to "Abide" and remain connected to Christ.

How Do We Make This Happen?

* Through Relationship(s). John 15 paints an intimate imagery of relationship in abiding. It binds together the Father, Son and Community. Which lets us know that God is not at a distance and nor should we be distant from one another.

* Through Reliance. Dependency and inter-relatedness is rarely valued in our community and in our churches like individualism and independence is. But John makes it very clear that we cannot produce anything by ourselves. Thusly, our reliance on God is bigger than being active in church but abiding in Christ and staying in community.

* Through Removal. Abiding in Christ is not a free ride of an easy laid back life. It is God's will that we not only produce, but that we flourish (2b). And that involves the process of pruning (cutting off). We must be submitted to the will of God that the removal and departures that will take place in our lives will not disconnect us from our source of life.

* Through Reproducing. Not only must we be submitted to God for our own flourishing but for the flourishing of all of humanity. The fruit that God desires us to produce is for the flourishing of the other. The fruit that the vine produces is picked and used for the pleasure, leisure and nourishment of another. We must be committed to Christ for the betterment of the whole of humanity.

Our Responsibility

The list above is primarily the work that God will do in us if we "Abide: Stay Connected." However, Divine sovereignty does not negate human responsibility. Therefore, we must:

1. Be Dutiful-Engaging in the work necessary and to use our gifts or the better of both church and community. Asking the right and the hard questions

2. Discovering-becoming aware of

- What are our needs?
- What are the areas for growth and improvement?
- What is my role in aiding in growth and improvement?

3. Developing- to create; to expand by process of growth

- People
- Spiritual Disciplines
- Best Practices and Systems

NOTE: The expectation is that heads of ministries and leaders will be actively engaged in these objectives as we seek to improve ministry and spiritual investment across the board.

SOME THINGS TO COME IN 2021

- Quarterly Leadership Intensives
- Continued Improvement Of Technology And Media
- Equipment Updates To Sanctuary
- Expanding And Optimizing Our Online Presence
- Continuing To Increase Our Presence And Impact In The Community