

Major Glenda Da...: During these days of social distancing, we've been reminded of the importance of staying connected. In our separation, we need to find ways to be together. Most people have a desire to be with others because we have a need to belong. We are social beings. We need to be in community. Hopefully, you found different ways to do that with your family and friends.

Well, we can also take this time to be closer to Jesus. We were made to be in communion with God. In our scripture this morning, we hear the words of Jesus. "Remain in me and I will remain in you." And these words are echoed in various ways throughout scripture. "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. I will be your God and you will be my people." He invites us into a loving, close relationship with him.

And when we talk about remaining, it simply, yet profoundly means that we stick with him, that we stay with him, that we continue to dwell with him, that we are present. It means we keep in contact with him and not just in a casual way, but we stay closely connected to him through prayer, in our solitude times, and in life itself. Eugene Peterson says, "Your life is a journey, you must travel with a deep consciousness of God." The union between a branch of a vine and the main stem is the closest any two things can come to each other, and that's the kind of relationship that Jesus wants to have with us, that kind of closeness.

When we have that kind of relationship with him, several things happen. First of all, we have a productive life. Jesus says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing." A branch connected to its source receives everything it needs to live. And the only way that we can truly live a Christian life is to stay connected to Christ. Apart from him, we can do nothing, but we can do all things through him who gives us strength. In him, we live and move and have our being.

When we remain in Christ, we also have powerful prayers. He says, in our passage, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you ask whatever you will, and it will be done. Ask whatever you wish and it will be done." This is about deepening our relationship with him to the point that we know and understand his heart as much as any human being can. And we pray prayers that are Your Will Be Done, kind of prayers. It means we become so connected to him that we ask for things according to his will. Ask what we will, and it will be done because we are living in his will, we are remaining in him and his words remain in us.

A life that remains in Christ also has lasting love. "As the father has loved Me, so have I loved You. Now remain in my love," Jesus says. And how do we remain in his love? "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love just as I have obeyed my father's commands and remain in his love." And what are his commands that we need to obey? It's love and love, love for God and love for our neighbors. And that sums up the 10 commandments.

Jesus says, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." Did you hear that? Not just love each other, but love each other as I have loved you. And how has he loved us? Well, he loves us with agape, an unconditional love that cannot be matched by any human affection. This is the highest standard of love.

His love is demonstrated when he laid down his life for us. Greater love has no one than this, that he laid down his life for his friends. This is a love that cannot be matched. The measure of his love was a self-sacrificing love even to death. This is the ultimate limit, we can go no further than this. So how do we as imperfect human beings even begin to love like Jesus? Remain in him. Remain in his love and allow the love of Jesus to flow through us to others. And if we do what he commands, we are his friends.

Verse 14. Jesus says, "You are my friends. If you do what I command, I no longer call you servants. Instead, I have called you friends." A life remaining in him is a life of relationship with Jesus. This is an amazing privilege for people such as ourselves to be called friends of Jesus.

So while life has changed so much for us in these days, Jesus has not changed. He still says, "Remain in me and I will remain in you." While we practice social distancing, let us take this time to become closer to God. May God bless you.