

“Burdened?”

Acts 10:44-48, 1John 5:1-6
John 15:9-17

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Have you ever gone to a hotel where they have a little form sitting there that says “Please fill out and tell us how your stay was?” I was thinking about that because last week we talked about abiding in Christ, staying with Christ, so I wondered if I could come up with a little form to pass out to ask you, “How was your abiding in Christ this week?”

If you’re like me, there are often times where I end up thinking it’s not so easy for me to think about how my stay was, but I end up wondering, “How do I stay?” How do I continue to abide in Christ? Oftentimes I think we have particular experiences of God’s grace. We notice the wonder of that love. I expect that we’ve all had those particular experiences at some time or other, maybe directly, maybe through somebody else. Then we think: what does it mean to abide in that love? Not to just have experienced it that one time, but what does it mean to abide in it. How do we do that?

As I was thinking about that, I think about how often I might go about trying to make that something that I can accomplish. There’s a way in which if I just do the right things in my life, I might know that I’m abiding in God’s love. In other words, I turn it into a task that I can accomplish. When I find myself doing that, I recognize that there are all kinds of other things coming in, the world encroaching on who I am. I also find that it merely becomes another burden to bear. And so when I hear these words in 1st John that say God’s command is not burdensome, it makes me step back and wonder about the burden I feel and what I might do.

I think the first thing that I can do, that we can do, is to notice that it’s exactly there, where we feel burdened, recognizing our own struggles, our own sin, that God has entered into our lives. That’s exactly where God comes in Jesus Christ. Coming to each of us to meet us in the midst of our own struggle, our attempt to understand and try, and also to live with our own failures. It is there that God comes in Jesus Christ, not to condemn us, but to let us know that we

are loved, that God wants to enter in and give us new life. So as I remember that that's what God is about in Jesus, I again ask, how do I abide in that love?

I think first, it's noticing that something is born, it's not something I achieve. In that recognition, in one's experience of God's love, what is born is a beginning of trust or faith. I can begin to recognize that it is God that is the One who lets me know what life is about and who I am.

It's interesting, as we read these scriptures, that abiding in Christ, living out the commandments, seemed to me to begin with faith, trusting in Jesus, trusting moment by moment, day by day. Trusting that what God is doing and has done is what is real. That's not to say that trusting is easy. Not to say that the world is changed because we can abide in Christ's love, that we can trust it. In fact, it often seems the world hasn't changed that much at all.

What we live with, then, is this conflict of interest that goes on outside of us and in. As trite as it seems, all those old movies that showed the white angel on one side and the red devil on the other side seem to describe something of our experience. There's a conflict of interest going on inside. In meeting Christ and knowing Christ we begin to recognize that we are called to listen to one side more than the other, to begin to trust in what God is doing in our lives, to listen, to hear, to follow. Not to think that I can do it all by myself, but I trust in God, allow God to work.

In some ways, I think it's in those moments when I say, "Yes, I'll trust," that what I do is open a door allowing the Spirit to work with me in ways that don't happen without that opening door, without my saying yes. It's our opportunity to say yes again and again and see how God leads us. It feels to me like what happens, then, as we begin to trust and make that decision to trust over and over again is that instead of it becoming a burden, we want to live out that love that we've experienced from God, we want to share. Instead of it becoming a burden, it becomes part of who we are.

It feels to me that what happens is that God made us to be a particular kind of people and as we trust in God, as we begin to allow

that love to work in our lives, and to work out of our lives, there's something that fits together. If you've ever tried working with a puzzle and at the very last minute you take a little twist and all of a sudden it comes apart or it goes together, that's what I think it's like in those moments when we experience that grace entering in and through us and we live in it. There are those moments when we recognize it. In fact, it's not a burden at that point at all. Rather we hear those words of Jesus where he says I want to give you my joy that your joy might be complete. It's in those moments when we recognize that it snaps together, it fits, and we recognize whose we are.

As we make those decisions, it's a little bit like graduating. It's graduating (as we are celebrating college students graduating this weekend). In graduating in our faith, we say yes to Christ. When we say we will trust, we will have that faith, we will go with you, then we graduate into what I think is the real world. People often talk about school as if it's not the real world, and then we will go into the real world, and yet many of us who have gone into the real world sometimes wonder how real that world is.

I do think that when we say yes and when we trust in Christ we're beginning to really enter the real world, the world God has created, the world God calls us into and invites us to experience. We deal with all the conflicts of interest in our lives, the struggle to continue to say yes and to trust, because there are a lot of voices that tell us not to trust. It's not necessarily easy, but it's not a burden. In fact, as we do it, I think, we do know the wonder of those times where it comes together and we recognize the reality of God's grace in our lives. It's an invitation to say yes, now and the next moment, the next hour, the next day. Each moment of our lives, each day of our lives, each year of our lives, to say yes and to trust in the grace of God and to begin to see our lives transformed, and, I believe, our burdens lifted. Amen.