

John 15:1-11
“Do the Meno”
The Rev. Dr. Jean Halligan Vandergrift
Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA
Fourth Sunday in Lent, March 27, 2022

The Reading:

John 15:1-11

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ 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. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

When I was in college, my mother started ballroom dancing. She got good at it and enjoyed it, so much so that she would sometimes invite me to one of her class parties on a guest pass. There, her dance instructor, Jim, would give me a lesson.

He was an excellent teacher, but I was so self-conscious! I didn’t know the dance, or its steps. I was afraid of stepping on his toes and of looking into his eyes; I didn’t trust myself or his leadership. It wasn’t fun, because I couldn’t get out of *my own way!*

Dancing can be intimidating and not much fun, especially if we are preoccupied with choreography and doing it without any mistakes. Sure, there are a lot of things to keep in mind as we move. I always liked what Ginger Rogers said: “I do everything the man does, just backwards and in high heels!”

Of course, dance need not be gendered. Women can lead; men can follow. Dance includes same-sex couples too. It is for all.

As I have been saying this last month, dance can also serve as a metaphor for the Reign of God. Our goal is doing the Basileia through out life, following the lead of the Divine.

Granted, doing this Reign of God dance may seem harder these days, because uncertainty is prevalent. People find it hard to plan their next steps. For example, there was no established choreography to follow at the beginning of the pandemic. We still don’t know the exact moves for getting through the reckoning to racial justice. With climate change, you and I are making up a good deal as we go. I appreciate what Rev. Dr. Sarah Drummond said in her keynote at Super Saturday: “Our communities are

disoriented, changing quickly, and looking to their leaders for guidance in a time when *none of us* knows where we're going."¹

Yes, it's as if we are dancing with each other without a pre-determined routine. And yet, as with dance, if you have capable leaders under God, you can **relax into their rhythm, discern guidance for your feet, and start to experience the promised joy of verse 11. Jesus calls this spiritual practice "abiding" in the Vine.**

"Abiding" has several shades of meaning. It can mean physically *remaining* in one place or *staying* in relationship. Jesus used this word in Gethsemane, when he asked his disciples: "Stay with me; abide here with me; watch and pray." (Taize version of Matt. 26:28)

"Abiding" also connotes close communication with the Holy One, a kind of conversation with or *without* words. I think of Elijah 'hearing' God through a still, small voice (1 Kings 19:12), and Jesus pointed out that the Vine also 'communicates' nutrients to the branches.

"Abiding" carries, too, the sense of an abode, or home. When Jesus promised the disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit, he described it as he and God "making their home" with us. (Jn 14:23)

A man named Tom came to a counselor, because he was feeling completely dissatisfied in his job and depressed. He had been working there for ten years, all that time planning his escape, always wishing "for the promised land of his ambitions." The counselor asked: "Have you ever thought of embracing *where you are* and fully entering this job?" "It's not worth it. It's beneath me. A robot could do it better." "But you do it everyday, though half-heartedly, feeling bad about yourself for doing it badly." "You're saying that I should go into this stupid job as if my heart was in it?" "*You're* in it, aren't you?"²

Abiding. Tom remained in his menial job *and* in counseling, starting school in parallel. **Over time, he began to feel the positive benefit of all this 'abiding.'** Eventually, it helped him find the position of his dreams once his education bore fruit.

In a congregation that I pastored, the deacons wanted to learn more about spirituality. We called upon a facilitator for an evening event. I knew that this person was top-notch, but in truth I expected *words* about prayer, maybe some bible study, or a lecture about how to be close to God. I wasn't the only one surprised when she invited us into a dance activity!

I was paired with Michael, a great guy, twice my age. We were instructed to stay within close proximity, but in our own personal space, no touching. We had to *intuit* each other's movements so that we mirrored each other. Michael totally got into this, which broke through *my* inhibitions, enabling my playful side. During those few minutes, we simply danced and enjoyed each other and the Spirit! **We were abiding.**

The Greek verb for abide is "meno." You've heard of other dances with names like the Tennessee Waltz, the Swim, and that one from *Pulp Fiction*, whatever it was

¹Tiffany Vail, "At Super Saturday, Rev. Drummond Talks About Making Plans When So Much is Unknown," *5 Things to Know and Share*, SNEUCC newsletter, 3/22/22.

²Adapted from Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 8.

called (*demonstrate with the eyes*). **Well, doing the Meno is *abiding in Christ*, relaxing into God's rhythm, and following the Spirit.**

If *you* were to relax into the arms of the Holy One *right now*, here in the pews or at home online, what dance move would you make? I invite (or dare) you – whatever is necessary – to do your version of the Meno now, on the count of three. Ready? 1, 2, 3...