

“Being A Righter Of Wrongs”
Psalm 22:25-31
1 John 4:7-21
John 15:1-8

We have gathered the Fifth Sunday of Easter to remember and experience this truth: Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Jesus rose from the dead, accomplishing forgiveness, rebirth, and God’s saving power for humanity. About the transformational power of the resurrection for those tough times in life, Brent Curtis writes,

If I’m not abiding in Jesus, then where is it that I abide? I once asked myself. I began to notice that when I was tired or anxious, there were certain sentences I would say in my head that led me to a familiar place. The journey to this place would often start with me walking around disturbed, feeling as if there was something deep inside that I needed to put into words but couldn’t quite capture. I felt the “something” as anxiety, loneliness, and a need for connection with someone. If no connection came, I would start to say things like, “Life really stinks. Why is it always so hard? It’s never going to change.” If no one noticed I was struggling or asked me what was wrong, I found my sentences shifting to a more cynical level: “Who cares? Life is a joke.” Surprisingly, by the time I was saying those last sentences, I was feeling better. The anxiety was greatly diminished. . . . Eugene Peterson in *The Message* translates John 15:7, Jesus’ words on abiding, this way: “If you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon.” Jesus was saying in answer to my question, “I have made my home in you, Brent. But you still have other comforters you go to. You must learn to make your home in me.”¹

The tough times in life, those tense experiences where your sense of what’s right and wrong collides with another person’s sense of what’s right and wrong, are real. This is where your relationship with Jesus Christ is of great significance.

¹Taken from <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2003/may/14419.html>. The source is Brent Curtis and John Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance* (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997).

The tough times in life can easily cause anxiety and sadness. Yet, with the one who loved first living in us, Jesus' love which we remember and abide in, moves us from anxiety and sadness to joy. Abiding in Jesus produces joy when we remember he is the way, the truth, and the life. Moreover, the Greatest Commandment, The Sermon on the Mount and Matthew 25 encourage us to love from the bedrock of joy that abiding in Jesus provides during tough times. In this regard, Latasha Morrison, author of *Be The Bridge*, our resource book for this series writes, "If we are going to move forward in this country, if we're going to make things right, it's time to go beyond simply raising awareness. Yes, awareness is a wonderful first step, but as Christ followers, as people called to mend and mediate broken relationships, it's our job to do better."² Making wrongs right requires acknowledgement and concrete actions to make up for the wrong and institute behaviors that ensure corrected outcomes to wrongdoing.

Psalm 22:25-31, 1 John 4:7-21 and John 15:1-8 proclaim deliverance has been accomplished and we can experience joy in the midst of tough times while deliverance occurs.

Psalm 22:25-31 declares that it is the Holy Spirit who energizes us to love God and others and rejoice in tough times. Psalm 22:30 reads "Posterity will serve him [God]; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he [God] has done it."

1 John 4:7-21 teaches that love is not seen or experienced as a human power, but the very nature of God exuding through us, in life's tough times, as we trust in the one

²Latasha Morrison, *Be The Bridge* (WaterBrook, 2019), 154.

who loved us first. 1 John 4:12 reads, "...if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us."

John 15:1-8 indicates that since we abide in Christ, all that we ask, and desire will resemble what Christ would do in those tough times of life. Central to our lives exuding joy which translates in how we love others in tough times is our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. How do we check that status, if you will? Eight times in these verses, Jesus invites his followers to abide in him. The word abide simply means to remain. That is, from my perspective, am I remaining in my relationship with Jesus, fifty-one percent and more each day in my thoughts, words and behavior? Rodger Y. Nishioka writes, "Jesus uses familiar viticultural imagery of a vine and its branches to teach his followers not only about the spiritual practice of abiding in Jesus, but also for understanding their place in God's kingdom."³ John 15:5 reads, Jesus says, "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." For those of you who understand effective gardening, there is always a pruning process to keep plants and trees growing healthily. The same is true in the Christian's life. During tough times, when we resist being obedient to God's way but eventually come around, righting the wrong, is God's pruning process to help our lives be more beneficial for self, but most particularly for others. Claiming the promise that we can do nothing apart from Jesus is an act of abiding.⁴

³Rodger Y. Nishioka in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 262.

⁴In the four paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Rhodora E. Beaton, Steven J. Kraftchick, Lindsey S. Jodrey, Deidre Good and Rodger Y. Nishioka in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year B, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), 254-255, 256-258, 258-259, 260-262 and 262-264.

The message of the Fifth Sunday of Easter is this: we can face tough times with joy knowing that Jesus is loving in and through us. Righting wrongs is a worthy endeavor. If you are losing hope or have lost hope. ...If you have feelings of being lost, alone, vulnerable and abandoned. ...Then cry out to Jesus. Latasha Morrison, writes, “Righting the wrong isn’t always as complicated as we want to make it. But so often, righting the wrong, making reparations, is precisely where the conversation ceases to move forward, because it requires that we give up something: yielding influence, decentering our own experience, letting go of privilege. Reparations require sacrifice.”⁵ By definition, reparation means “the making amends for a wrong; the action of repairing something.”⁶ Making amends for a wrong and the action of repairing something moves us beyond awareness. Moving beyond awareness requires humility and sacrifice.

When we make amends for a wrong and act on repairing something, we are doing what Jesus did. Abide in Jesus. Therein lies joy for the journey of deliverance. Be humble. Be an empathetic historian. Be a reconciler and healer. Be for the oppressed. Be a righter of wrongs. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 2 May 2021
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⁵Latasha Morrison, *Be The Bridge*, 164.

⁶*Concise Oxford Dictionary* tenth edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1213.