

“Stay Connected”

John 15:1-8

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

Frankfort, Kentucky

May 3, 2015

Communion Devotion

This morning our attention is drawn to the Upper Room where Jesus gathered with his disciples prior to his arrest and crucifixion. Our text is a part of the conversation Jesus had that evening with his disciples.

The events and discussion that occurred in that room were obviously important to those who contributed to the writing and formation of the fourth gospel. A large portion of this book, 13:1-17:26, was devoted to telling us what happened that night.

The focal passage for us today is found in the second unit, which runs from 14:1-16:33. This unit is the centerpiece of the Upper Room material. In this section, Jesus prepared the disciples for his imminent departure and their lives and ministries afterwards.

As you would expect, every word Jesus spoke was carefully chosen. There was no time to waste because there would not be another opportunity to speak to the disciples before his arrest and crucifixion.

Based upon our text, what did Jesus want the disciples to know? What did he want them to take away from this part of his farewell discourse that would help them as they charted a new course for their lives? I believe it was this.

The relationship the disciples had with Jesus would not end with his crucifixion, and they would need to remain as close to him in the future as they had been before his departure. At all times and in all places the disciples would need to stay as close to Jesus as a branch is to a vine. The failure to do so would have disastrous consequences.

Eight times in this brief portion of the conversation Jesus had with the disciples that night he used the word ‘remain’ or ‘abide’. Listen as I share these particular verses with you.

After telling his disciples he was the true vine, Jesus gave them these specific instructions. “**Remain** in me and I will **remain** in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must **remain** in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you **remain** in me.” (John 15:4)

Again, Jesus said to them, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man **remains** in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.” (John 15:5)

“If anyone does not **remain** in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” (John 15:6)

“If you **remain** in me and my words **remain** in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” (John 15:7)

If for some reason the disciples missed the significance of staying close to Jesus through the repetition of the word ‘remain’, he bluntly said to them, “Apart from me, you can do nothing.” (John 15:5b)

Why was Jesus so adamant about maintaining this close relationship with the disciples? He knew what was coming their way.

Jesus was confident the disciples would encounter the same kind of treatment and temptations he faced. Their journey, like his, would be difficult and demanding. Without Jesus’ help, the disciples would not persevere.

Jesus also knew the disciples would be given opportunities to spread the gospel in places he was unable to go. Without his help, the disciples would not seize these opportunities and travel down unfamiliar roads.

In addition, I believe Jesus was concerned the disciples might become overconfident and lulled into thinking they could be faithful on their own. This had happened to others with good intentions, and it could happen to them. If it did, they would become distracted, lose their focus and make mistakes that would undermine the work they were called to do.

“Apart from me,” Jesus said, “you can do nothing.” Jesus could not have made their dependence upon him any clearer.

“Apart from me, you can do nothing.”

How seriously do we take Jesus’ words and warning? How many of us have gone through periods of overconfidence when we were lulled into thinking we could be faithful on our own? It didn’t take long to realize we had made a mistake, did it?

Following in Jesus’ footsteps is not humanly possible. Living as Jesus taught and modeled, commonly known as the Golden Rule, will put us on a collision course with those who have adopted the world’s values. Remaining faithful will require divine help.

“Apart from me,” Jesus said, “you can do nothing.”

Where are you now in your relationship with Jesus? How close or far away are you?

I wonder what you would be able to do if you relied more on Jesus for wisdom, guidance, strength, courage and even patience.

What challenges would you say yes to?

What temptations would you say not to?

What opportunities to serve others in Jesus' name would you seize?

What risks would you take to advance the kingdom of God?

Where would you speak out on behalf of those who are being oppressed, mistreated or ignored?

What would you do to repair or improve a relationship?

How would you be a better employee or employer?

What would you do to become a better student?

What problem would you tackle?

What delicate issue would you address?

What limitation would you accept?

What dream would you pursue?

What journey would you begin?

Think about this as we approach this table and draw near to the same Jesus who spoke to his disciples that night in the Upper Room. Begin your own conversation with the Lord where you express your desire to seek his will and reflect his nature in all you say and do.

Ask Jesus to help you cultivate a closer relationship with him this week as you face your own set of challenges and opportunities. I assure you he will do his part.