

Sermon August 30, 2009 – Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost**The Very Rev'd Dr. Philip C. Linder****Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23**

“Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take my mind and think through it; take my heart and set it on fire for your Holy Gospel.” +Amen.

What are the places where you abide? To abide is to remain, to continue, and to stay. The places where you abide are those where your heart, mind, body, and soul literally reside. Perhaps more pointedly the question should be what are the places where you spend most of your time abiding? Do you abide mostly in the acquisition of material things and wealth? Do you abide mostly with reality TV or the internet? Do you abide mostly with a cable news network? Do you abide mostly on your cell phone, Facebook, or Twitter? Do you abide mostly on the golf course or tennis court? Do you abide mostly in USC or Clemson football? Do you abide mostly in “whatever,” that is not your faith in God in Jesus Christ?

Jesus said, “He or she who abides in me...bears much fruit for apart from me you can do nothing. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire and it shall be done for you.” (John 15: 5-7) The call of Jesus to his disciples over and over again is that they should be centered, they should reside...“abide” in the very place of God. The Son of God was reiterating the constant teaching that came before him in the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament, that it is from God from whom our lives must flow. Psalm 91 begins: *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, abides under the shadow of the Almighty.*

Perhaps one of the first challenges for the Christian is to re-examine the place where we primarily abide. Abiding in God through Jesus Christ strengthens us and our lives in ways that are unimaginable! Jesus is not saying that when you abide in him, then anything that you ask for you will get, but rather that you will know in essence what to ask for in accordance with God’s will because you are abiding. When I download I

Tunes from my laptop to my I Pod, across the tiny screen it reads “synchronizing do not remove.” To abide in Jesus Christ is to be synchronizing all the time with God, to be living in the psalmist’s words, “under the shadow of the Almighty.”

In today’s Gospel passage from Mark, where is it that the hearts and minds of the Pharisees and scribes seem to be abiding? They question Jesus, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?” (Mark 7) Both the Pharisees and the scribes were of course referring to the tradition of thoroughly washing both one’s hands and anything bought at the marketplace to assure that they were ritually clean before eating. Their focus or place of abiding is upon their law, that’s not how we do it, their viewpoints...I disagree, and that closes their minds and hearts to the Gospel that Jesus is proclaiming in their midst and those disciples eating with unwashed hands are seeking to live out. So Jesus calls the crowd back to gather around him to teach them further, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile...for it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come...”

There is a challenge to all of us to keep our eyes on the prize; that is, to live daily abiding with God in Christ. The great faith and tradition we have as Episcopalians and Anglicans is the centrality of the Holy Eucharist as our foundation and starting point for abiding in Jesus Christ. The Son of God as fully human and fully divine is quite unfathomable if left alone to the human mind. The miracle of the Incarnation is that the Word of God, the Logos, became a little baby that could not speak, but rather just be with us—Immanuel, God with us.

God became flesh to abide with us in Jesus. And then Jesus left to the Church his promise of being fully present to us in the palpable and digestible elements of bread and wine—*Take eat, this is my Body. Take, drink, this is my blood.* You and I come to this holy table every Sunday and many weekdays to abide in Jesus Christ and be given sustenance for the challenges of the week ahead. Our prayers and study of Holy Scripture during the week strengthen us even further, and point us back should we stray

as to our abiding with God in Jesus Christ. It was Bishop Hultstrand who wrote, “To be a member of the Body of Christ, the Church, is to be a person of prayer. This, (he wrote) is a simple statement, but its ramifications are as complex as the totality of life. We are speaking of a prayer life that is active on every plane of our existence.” (The Praying Church)

May our central place of abiding be in Jesus, the Son of God, and those other varied good places of our lives where we also abide always come second. + **Amen.**