

The Jesus Identity: I AM The Vine

John 15: 1-8

August 2, 2009

Title: Abide (Dialogue sermon with Vicar Shawn)

Yes sirree, this is my favorite time of year. I'm not talking about the mid-summer heat. I'm not talking about all those good NC vegetables ripening. I'm talking about something far more delicious than biting into a ripe tomato and something hotter than 98 degrees with 100% humidity. What I'm talking about is the intern's final evaluation.

Yes, it's my very favorite time of year. Since last August it's been dangling over the intern's head. The intern supervisor has to write this 9 page evaluation. Get it, 9 pages of questions. And these are good questions.

Such things as how does the intern relate to the children, the youth and the adults in the parish? How well is the intern integrating Lutheran theology into his sermons? Tell us about the intern's style of evangelism? Does the intern get along with the staff, the internship ministry team, the supervisor? Describe the intern's sense of call.

Now there are some additional questions I wish were included. Does the intern have any annoying habits? Then I could squeeze in the one thing that gets under your skin. I'm not referring to his constant focus on all things Buffalo or bragging about how many famous people grew up in Jamestown, NY. What I'm talking about is that he sings in the hallways. It doesn't seem to matter what time of day it is. This vicar comes down the hallway singing. Not only is it nothing I've ever heard; it's also not exactly, how do I say it-- on key. But there isn't a question about hallway singing on the intern's evaluation. So here's how I'll squeeze it into the evaluation:

Vicar Shawn's exuberance is over the top. What do you think?

My favorite time of year-- intern evaluation. In my very caring, pastoral hands is this seminarian's future. I can choose among three boxes on the evaluation:

- recommend Shawn for ordination
- conditional recommendation for ordination
- do not recommend.

His whole future hangs on this. It's a great time of year. I'm thinking of borrowing some words from Jesus. If I check DO NOT RECOMMEND, I'll add these words "He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit." If I check conditional recommendation, I'll write in Jesus' statement "Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit." If I agree to recommend the vicar for ministry I'll add this thought "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit."

How about that? Right here in John 15 is an evaluation. Not just for interns, but for all who follow Jesus. Staying connected to Jesus. That's what the life of faith is about. What do you think?

PD:(Shawn walks to the altar) Where are you going?

VS: I'm coming up here to address your questions about my evaluation?

PD: You are what?

VS: Well, I figured since you told everybody this was your favorite time of year because you ENJOYED intern evaluations, I'd get some equal time.

PD: What do you mean? You evaluate me? Just like a young New Yorker! You have got to be kidding.

VS: Come on, old guy, I don't get the chance to evaluate you or this congregation. It's not part of the program. But hey, I'm from New York, so I'm going to do that anyway. So sit down.

PD: Okay. I'm all ears. Just remember even though I did give you a great recommendation, I haven't signed it yet. You are at my mercy for two more weeks, young man.

VS: So you don't like my singing down the hallways at all times of the day. How do you think it made me feel when we were visiting people in the afternoons and you would be sitting there with your head back, eyes closed and mouth open sound asleep? What kind of supervisor would do that?

PD: One who is comfortable around his members?

VS: But you were in a conversation and the lady asked you a question and you were asleep?

PD: I hope you answered the question for me.

VS: How was I supposed to answer the question about preparing for your daughter's wedding?

PD: By pointing to me and saying it must be really tiring him out?

VS: Never mind. Anyway, I'm hearing us read from John 15 and this word just jumps off the page ABIDE.

PD: Yeah, you got that right. Yeah, 8 times in 8 verses Jesus speaks of abiding. He uses it as a verb and as a noun. And what a great word to unpack the image of the relationship between a vine and a branch. It's right there. Branches live off the vine; just the way we live off of Jesus. As we abide in him we grow. As we grow in him we bear fruit. He prunes us. It's both an active and a passive process. Branches participate in their growing and branches have no power over their growing. That's us –the branches.

So, I know you are a Greek geek, were you going to do a word study on the word abide?

VS: I was.....but thanks to you, I don't have to.

PD: Sorry old man....beat you to it...didn't I!! I'm still waiting for your final evaluation. Let's hear it. And by the way, let's see if you can keep from walking around so much. At my age, I get dizzy trying to follow your constant motion.

VS: Okay. Okay. I'll stand right here. Here are two things: pruning sheers and a fruit basket.

PD: I'm with you. Go ahead.

VS: It's our prayerful duty to remind these good Christians that following Jesus means both pruning sheers and fruit baskets are needed. We are to point to how Jesus is pruning this community and how he is bearing fruit through it. That's a message of abiding in Jesus.

PD: So where is Christ Jesus taking out his sheers?

VS: First let me say that this year my internship has been quite full. How many interns spend a year at a church where they celebrate a major anniversary, don't have a quorum for an annual meeting, change a Sunday morning schedule that's been a constant for 18 years, send an associate pastor on sabbatical, send their youth director to seminary, consider adding a mission minister, bring on a summer intern. Just in naming those very things I've seen Jesus pruning and Jesus holding up a fruit basket at Good Shepherd church.

PD: Tell Vicar Nathaniel to get ready.

VS: I will. Jesus' sheers sometimes don't feel too good. I've been reading on Facebook about how much the youth are grateful for Dan's ministry and they also have mentioned how much they are going to miss him.....

PD: I've been reading that on Facebook, too!

VS:It's a pruning season here. A time to know that Jesus abides. A time to hold on to the vine. A time of uncertainty, but also a time when we are to stay grafted on. What's going to happen next for our youth ministry here? Yes, Brian Grimes is coming in...and yes, this is a time for us to live by our faith that Jesus abides.

PD: Well said. Go on.

VS: And are you aware of that basket? I mention the baptisms in this community alone. Creighton Christopher Mitchell is the 24th person baptized here since I came to begin my internship. Wow! Look at the tender lives Jesus has brought to this place. This is fruit basket season too. Pruning is not the only thing. Rich gifts of lives to be shaped in faith, to be taught to believe, belong and serve....growing disciples. It makes me want to sing.

PD: Oh, please, I beg you.

VS: Sign that Internship Evaluation Form and I'll give you a break.

PD: That's a deal.

VS: You heard it folks!

PD: The good news is that your final evaluation, my final evaluation, their final evaluation is in the hands of Jesus. And that's the real question to address on anyone's evaluation: Because Jesus abides with you, how are you abiding in him?

VS: Remember the pruning sheers and the fruit basket.

PD: Whatever you say Almost Pastor Shawn!

