

SERMON 830

Feast of Saint Matthias

Sixth Week after the Epiphany

February 19, 2014

933rd Week as Priest

759th Week at St Dunstan's

24th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

ABIDE IN ME

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

This past Sunday night, I led a holy conversation on the subject of God's Garden. Saint Paul told the new Christians in Corinth that they were God's garden, God's farm, God's field. We had an insightful and significant discussion—and I look forward to a similar, important conversation this coming Sunday on God's Building. The images are plentiful—we are like living stones built into a spiritual house, said Saint Peter. Christ is made our sure foundation, says a favorite hymn.

But placed between these two Sundays is the Feast of Saint Matthias, the replacement who was chosen for Judas Iscariot after his betrayal and death, Matthias, about whom little is known except for his death as a martyr at the hands of an executioner.

The Gospel lesson is what interests me most, however, because of an oft-repeated word. Jesus says, "Abide with me." "Abide" appears seven times in this short passage from John, and it is a curious choice. To abide means to wait for, and to endure something, and it also

means to accept something without objection. But there is a more archaic and ancient meaning that goes to the heart of our relationship with Christ and his Church. “Abide with me,” says our Lord, and he is actually saying, “Stay with me, dwell with me, make your home with me.” Another word for home, of course, is abode. To abide with our Lord means to make his home our home, to make his church our church, to make his church our home.

That can be a difficult task if your church is locked up tight except for worship and other a few other events during the year. Making your church your home is nearly impossible if you only visit the place for an hour or so on Sunday morning. How can church become home if we don’t spend some time there? No, our church has to be more than the address of a regular weekly appointment. It must be a place of sanctuary, of comfort, of sights and smells and sounds that are as familiar to us as our own kitchen.

Making your church your home is difficult in another way. If church is barren, stark, and lonely, then it’s unlikely that it’s going to feel like home. No, our home should be a place of beauty and of peace. Our home should be welcoming to family, friends, and strangers. If the church is really going to become home to us, it needs to be cared for, tended, repaired, and even celebrated. (And by the way, did you know that we have a worship service called *The Celebration and Blessing of a Home?*)

Leigh and I have owned and lived in five homes during our 37 years of marriage. We moved often over those years, and the longest we lived in one of those homes was six years. However, during those

years, the Episcopal Church, wherever we lived, always felt most like home.

My parents moved from Auburn in 1982, the year my father retired from the university. They sold the house my five brothers and I grew up in, and it was a much harder experience than I anticipated. It was home, and suddenly it was no longer our home.

About that same time, my uncle and aunt sold the family farm in Michigan, a 600-acre farm that my great-great grandfather homesteaded in 1837. Warrens had raised draft horses and dairy cows there for more than 150 years. We loved that farm, that stone house, the corn fields and silos, the barn with WARREN spelled out in huge block letters on the shingled roof. My brother Jim and I worked there in the summers when we were in college at Auburn. It had been home for us all, and suddenly it was no longer our home.

Home, you see, doesn't have the permanence, the sense of place, the abiding presence that it once had. Everybody moves. We're all on the go. We can't stand still. So where is home for us? Where do you feel you belong? Let me suggest that your church is home, wherever you are, wherever you go. Make your home here, with Christ, in the beauty of holiness, and abide with him. **AMEN.**