

The Daily Church Epistle

Wednesday, 5 May 2021

Greetings,

Today, I am sharing with you a reflection posted on the WI Annual Conference by Rev. Sue D'Alessio. She has additional experience and training in organizational leadership, systems theory, diversity awareness, and change dynamics. Rev. D'Alessio is our Director of Ministry and Outreach. If you would like more information about the conference staff or to read future reflections go to www.wisconsinumc.org. Kathy OBS.

Chosen. Appointed. Love One Another.

By Sue D'Alessio

You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

John 15:16-17

When I was in high school, our church hosted a Lay Witness Mission for adults and for youth. Overall, it was a fascinating experience having people from around the country come to our church for a week to give testimonies about their experiences of God and their faith. The youth component had adults who led us in trust exercises interspersed with times of listening to their witnesses and then them training and inviting us to trust God more deeply and then to explore and testify to our faith.

Throughout that intense week, I grew and learned more about my faith, my struggles with trust, and I began to be more intentional about witnessing to my faith. However, one witness challenged me in a less positive way, which caused me to struggle to define my experience of God more intentionally. The adult leader used this passage from John to explain that for him, because of his deep faith and love for God, he had begun to ask God for whatever he needed, even if it was something seemingly insignificant, and God would give him whatever he asked for. The story he told was that whenever he went anywhere, he would pray to God for a parking place close to his destination and God always granted that. Parking place? Really? That just didn't seem right to me. He and I had a couple conversations where I really questioned and challenged this interpretation of the scripture. He eventually told me that I needed more faith and that I was still immature in my faith if I didn't believe as he did. (I continue to disagree with his understanding of this scripture and, while I certainly needed to mature and increase in my faith, getting God to answer my every need and desire isn't the measure of my maturity in faith.)

Across the years, I have wrestled with this scripture and how to understand this complex series of sentences. This wrestling will continue the rest of my life – one of the gifts of scripture and faith!

I have come to believe that the kind of chosen, appointed, fruit-bearing love I continue to grow toward in my faith journey, means that whatever I pray for in the name of Jesus Christ could only

be aligned with whatever the fulness, healing, hopeful, life-giving grace of God is creating in the world. It also means that I am chosen and appointed to align my actions (not only my thoughts and prayers) in this glorious, lavish love of God with my whole heart, mind, soul, and being. The more I abide in the life-giving vine of Christ, tended by God, the greater my capacity to bear fruit and allow my life to be a witness and testimony of God's great love.

God chooses each of us. God appoints each of us. Each of us bears fruit as we abide in Christ. God hears and answers the deepest prayers of our souls. Each of us is called to whole-heartedly love one another fully, fruitfully, and faithfully.

Prayer: God of grace and love, Thank you for your presence with us and among us. Tend and nourish us so that your love bears the fruit of your mercy, justice, and blessing in this world. We pray in the abiding name of Jesus Christ. Amen.