

## “Holy Spirit marinade”

- Over the years I have come to admit something to myself
  - It has not been quick, or easy, and sometimes I do not want it to be true, but it is
  - That no matter what I do, or how much I try, or even how many special fancy tools I buy
    - (I have a bluetooth temperature device on my grill to tell me when steaks are cooked to perfection)
  - I am not that great of a cook.
  - I am a ok cook, an ok grill master
  - With good instructions, or a planned meal like Blue Apron, I can even fool you into thinking I am a great cook
  - But without a recipe and if left to my own devices I am an eggs and bacon kinda of cook, or maybe pasta
  - But I have learned that, especially with meat on the grill, a good marinade goes a long way
  - Dry rub, salt and pepper— even Zesty Italian dressing, as one friend used to insist was the best way to prepare a steak
  - Which ever you prefer, a good marinade will bring out the natural flavors, compliment those flavors, and even tenderize the meat before cooking
  - A good marinade can make an OK cook look great
  - My apologies to any vegetarians here today- I promise my next sermon will not be about meat.
  - I do hear rumor that you can marinade a mushroom as well, but I have no personal experience there
  - Believe it or not, I find that our spiritual journey to be similar in some ways to this very idea

- Throughout the last few weeks, we have heard a lot of scripture readings about love, and abiding, and bearing fruit
- Maybe it helps to consider ourselves marinating in the Holy Spirit
- Today makes the fourth Sunday in which the word “abide” has appeared in our readings
  - And we can take that a little for granted, gloss over it
  - Abiding, I think, is not unlike soaking in a marinade- Jesus tells us to abide in his love
  - If we take this a little more spiritually, abiding is more like dwelling, or being immersed- soaking in it, being surrounded by it
  - Dwelling, being, breathing in a spiritual way that allows God’s presence and love to sink in
  - We do this by intentionally setting time aside to pray, and to worship together regularly-
    - Christianity is not a solo practice- spirituality is not complete unless it includes other people
  - But I also see abiding as having an ongoing and open-ended conversation with God
  - Small moments throughout the day in which we acknowledge and remember God’s presence right then and there
  - Say a thank you, or express a concern or joy, or even those moments of desperation or sadness- we can breathe God in if we choose
  - When we do this, we abide- we begin to become more like what we soak in, and our perspective changes
  - This is how God transforms us, I believe
  - Now I do think sometimes God can suddenly and drastically change us- a conversion experience, if you will
  - But more often than not, I think God God works more slowly than that, subtly encouraging, temping, calling us to something different
  - And as we are slowly affected by abiding in God through prayer, worship, and caring for each other
  - We find that our perspective has changed, and we see the world differently
  - God doesn’t try and change our minds forcefully- God changes us... moves us to a different place, and then we change our own minds
  - Abiding in God’s love is how we willing allow ourselves to absorb God, and it changes how we see the world.
  - We begin to see the world more like God sees it

- Just this past week, I was at Fresh Start big group meeting down at the diocese
  - My last fresh start session in the diocese, as I am no longer new
  - Fresh start big groups usually have theme, some of them including Myers Briggs, ministry as jazz,
  - Topics on congregational development, HR and budgeting- all the things a priest must do from time to time
  - And this week was contemplative prayer- how appropriate for us this week as we are told to abide in God's love
  - At the very heart of contemplative prayer is not talking, or asking- it is being
  - And becoming more and more aware that our being is surrounded and engulfed by God's being
  - As our awareness of that grows, it shapes us and seeps into us
  - We can throughout the day, under any circumstances, tap into that presence that is always there
  - The silent inward glance towards God's being and presence in our lives
- Continuing with the food metaphor, our reading from Acts brings us a great example of how abiding can change us
  - This reading comes right after Peter sees a sheet coming down from heaven with food on it
  - Unclean food.
  - Peter is praying on the roof of a house, and three times Peter sees this vision, and each time God tells him to eat.
  - Each time, God says, "What I have made clean, you must not call profane."
  - And immediately after these series of visions about unclean food being made clean,
  - God brings Cornelius to see Peter. Cornelius is an unclean Gentile who wants to become a Christian
  - This entire chapter 10 of Acts has been setting up an important meeting between Peter and Cornelius
  - Between a Christian Jew, and an unclean Roman soldier
  - The message is clear- what God has declared clean we can not call profane
  - And it applies to people of all kinds- even, and this is a big one for the early church- it even applies to those who crucified Jesus, the Romans

- Even they can be a part of God's new plan and work in the world through the resurrected Christ
- God's kingdom expanding, more opening up to break through the current laws of exclusion
- This has certainly been a theme in this Easter season
- Embracing what once was unclean- whether it is a type of food or a group of people
- And bringing it into the community of faith reconciled to God
- This transition, however, did not come over night for Peter or Cornelius
  - Both men had to go through a process of abiding to get to this point where today's lesson begins
  - Both Peter and Cornelius spent much time in prayer where God was preparing them for this meeting
  - Peter seeing unclean food being made clean, Cornelius being instructed by God to go and find Peter
  - Had either of these two not been willing to allow God to lead and change them, this meeting would not have happened
  - For Peter, abiding in God's Spirit also meant letting go of something which meant a lot to him
  - Peter struggled with what he had been taught all along, that certain food and people were outside of God's grace
  - He had to let that go before God could use him to reach Cornelius and the other Gentiles in this passage who were hungry for the good news
  - The thing about abiding is that it will change us, sometimes asking us to go out and do something, sometimes asking us to let go of something
  - Being close to God, marinating in God's presence, abiding in the Spirit will change how we view the world
  - Just like it did to these two men
- As we consider what it means to abide in God's love, to be slowly changed by it
  - To let go of the things that limit and exclude, while embracing new opportunity for relationship with others
  - I am struck with one verse in particular in our Gospel today
  - Jesus says, "You did not chose me, but I chose you."
  - "And I appointed you to go and bear fruit."
  - While it is important to listen for God's call, to willingly abide in God's love through prayer and worship

- To be open to the change that it will bring
- We have to also remember that ultimately it is God who is doing the work here
- God is the one changing people, which produce changed attitudes including those who were once unclean
- And God has chosen us.
- And that is a big difference- when we choose, sometimes it can be on our own terms
- We go to the holy buffet and take the things we like, and leave the things that we do not- we are in charge
- But when God chooses us, it is God who is up to something, using us to accomplish who knows what
- If we open ourselves up to it, God will begin to seep into us, to slowly change us for the better
- Perhaps God needs us to let go of something, like Peter
- To tear down the boundaries that keep certain people away from God because we see them as unclean
- Perhaps there is something God wants us to do like Cornelius
- Perhaps God simply wants a deeper relationship with us for the moment, to surround us in this holy place
- But I am certain of this: God has chosen us.
- I hope we continue to abide in God, and allow God's Holy Spirit to bring zest to us and to those around us.

Amen.