

## Sermon for Easter VI 2009

### *Abide in My Love*

(Transferred to Easter IV)

The Rev. Steve Fuller

I am here today as a replacement for Mark. He asked me to change sermon dates with him mid-week and I was to be preaching on May 17<sup>th</sup>. This is the gospel lesson that I was working on and had already started my sermon. So, today it will not match the gospel lessons, but I feel that the message is still important to us all.

A few minutes ago, I asked the children, who do you see in my mirror? I am hoping that they will have responded, as I was writing, me. Children indeed are not only our children but also God's children. In the second lesson, we will hear in two weeks, John tells us, *"everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ, has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments."* Is that too much to digest in one sitting? For me, the second lessons usual come quickly, are way too short, and you have to read and re-read to be able to find the hidden meaning. I must say, that I do not always see the meaning, so I read on and see if the gospel of the day, connects them both. So I read on...

*“Jesus said to his disciples, as the Father loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” It goes on further to say, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”*

So now I see the connection. God is asking us, Jesus is asking us, to get along and treat each other as, equals. Do we do that here at Immanuel? If I ask each of you to look into my mirror, what do you see, who is holding you up behind the mirror? Are you as transparent as the mirror-image of what you see before you? Are you clear of your love for God and family, or could there be room for improvement in our lives? We are not, I repeat, not perfect.

In the past, Immanuel has done many events together, intergenerational events that were, FUN. Everyone was invited and pictures were taken to remind us of the event.

Pictures are an important part of our lives. We use them to show off a new grandchild, a child’s graduation, a pet, to those we love. We want them to know what part of our past was like. It is ok to have pictures. As we age, we tend to forget the events that made us happy, sad or changed our lives all together. Our

visions and hopes tend to change as we age also. What was once a clear vision for the future, changes as events in our own lives change. Our job, our children, our families, it matters not what triggers the event, it matters how we proceed to cope with what God has given us to overcome.

The late great John Lennon, in his song “Imagine” says;

*Imagine there is no heaven, it's easy if you try,  
No hell below us, above us only sky,  
Imagine all the people, living for today...  
Imagine there's no countries, it isn't hard to do.  
Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too,  
Imagine all the people, living life in peace...  
Imagine no possessions, I wonder if you can,  
No need for greed or hunger, a brotherhood of man,  
Imagine all the people, sharing all the world...  
You may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one,  
I hope some day you'll join us, and the world will be as one.*

John Lennon wrote this song back in 1971, are his visions for a better world that much different today than they were back then? I may have been much younger back then, a few more hairs on my head and certainly no greys. But when I think about his song, I can't help thinking, how right he was. He understood how people need each other to survive. Guess what, we still do. If we at Immanuel, want to survive, thrive and continue to grow, we need each other.

I was looking through some old photos here at Immanuel over at least a ten year time span, and I saw happiness in the faces of the members of Immanuel Church. We did, as I said before, fun things together. We took pictures of almost every event that took place here. We supported each other thru sad times and happy times, thru members coming and leaving, when Joan, our organist retired and Carole took over, thru Bp. Mary Adelia retiring and Bp. Tom arriving, thru Peggy's retiring and our journey alone until Mark joined us. We have been thru tough times and we will face many more before we are done. We will lose members for whatever reason, but we need to figure out how this family will continue.

Bill Chadwick wrote the following story in the last version of the Upper Room.

It is entitled, "Front-Porch People."

*"When I was a boy families would gather on their front porches in the evenings. This was a time for relaxing and sharing events from the day. Usually a neighbor or two would walk by and stop, just to visit.*

*With the frantic pace of the world, and with our intense focus on personal privacy, sitting on the front porch is a custom of the past. Now our gathering may be in the back yard, out of sight for those who need a friend. Only those invited feel welcome, and that invitation list can be exclusive.*

*Unlike us in our exclusiveness, God is always available to us through his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus was always present with the people, even in dangerous situations. And Christ remains available to each of us today, always holding open the door to fellowship.*

*In a similar way, we who are Christ's disciples are to be accessible; in our neighborhoods, at our church, at our workplaces. Christ calls us out of our safety and privacy to be both visible and vulnerable. Jesus Christ walks, talks, laughs and cries with us, and he wants us to do the same for others. Christians are called to be front-porch people for all the world."*

I related a similar story a couple of years ago on the same general topic. Our street had lost power in the evening and people were “forced” outside on a hot summer evening. We watched the children of the neighborhood play as we sat on the porches and laughed and talked. No one could sit inside and watch TV. They had to communicate with neighbors. In our neighborhood, we are both of the above. We sit on the front porches until the heat from the sun becomes unbearable then we move to someone’s back yard to continue our conversations. Our gate, is always open. People stop in if they know we are out back, hear laughter, or the kid’s playing in the yard. We look out for one another’s children, help neighbors when they need help and know what is going on in each other’s, world.

*“God spreads many beautiful things out in our world, the wonders of creation, great music, arts and books, the people we know and have yet to meet. If we are in a hurry we can miss the moments in our lives, even fail to recognize them while we are busy looking for something else. On the other hand, if we slow down we can notice these things, savor them in the moment, and praise God for presenting them to us.”*

Let me end with a short story that I have used before and read and reread from time to time from the IONA Community. I think again it is very appropriate for our life together. It is entitled, “Lifted High”.

A little kid ran across the street, runny-nosed, a bit scruffy, tripping over almost. She ran towards a man whose arms were opened wide to welcome her. “Give us a swing, Jesus,” she said, and felt herself lifted high, and she saw the street and sky whirling around her, ablaze with color, like a mixed-up rainbow. She was laughing then-excited and free, gasping for breath. “Enough,” she said, and she felt herself slowing down, relaxing, safe as Jesus held her in his arms and smiled.

Unless we become like little children,  
Unless we risk that joy and abandonment,  
Unless we run and ask and let ourselves be lifted high,  
We are never going to enter the kingdom of God.

AMEN