

I do not know if you have heard of this woman named Julian of Norwich. She was considered one of the greatest English mystics in the 15th century. When I was in seminary we had to read one of her writings. According to my reading, she was one of those pious people who lived in a cell attached to the church and spent their whole life in prayer for their community.

Can you imagine yourselves waking up at 4 in the morning and spending almost all day praying in a small room and go to bed at 8 in the evening. When I went to Egypt a few years ago, there were still lots of people doing the same in the desert and mountains. To them, life was pretty simple; waking up with God, walking with God, and going to bed with God. That's all they want; everything else was just simple and minimal.

So this woman, Julian, was part of this kind community. And said in one of her writings: "Love was the only word that could be used to describe God. God is totally love. We are called to love everyone whose lives we touch.

'But God,' we moan, 'if we are to love everyone, why on earth didn't you make everyone lovable?' And how are we to love if we are called to love those whom we don't even like very much and would prefer not to spend time with?" *Emphasis, Vol. 39, Number 1, 2009, 84-85.*

This is a powerful statement, especially because it was said by someone who seemed to try harder than anyone else in the world to live a good Christian life. When I read this little illustration, I thought, "Gee, if someone who spent her whole life in a little prayer room had this problem of loving, who in the world can really love others?"

Today is Mother's Day. We honor all the mothers in the world for the sacrifices they made for their families. It does not matter where you come from; mothers are all the same—they would do anything for their children!

Mothers are the foundation of our homes; I know the first question my two children ask me when they come home from school is "Where is Mom?" I was just like that when I was growing up. When your mother is sick, the whole family feels sick. When I went to Korea a few months ago, I had dinner with a close friend of mine; we had a good time talking and catching up while we were eating. But when we got to the point of his mother's death a year ago, this 51 year-old-man stopped eating and started weeping and weeping. A mother is a mother; it does not matter if you are 7 or 50 or even 80 years old. We are our Mothers' kids; we all owe tremendous love to our mothers.

But here is a question? Why do people turn their backs even on their own mothers? I was talking with someone on the phone the other day and she said, "Pastor Park, pray for my sister. It is just getting worse now; she doesn't even call but when she does she is just mean to my mother and gives her trouble; please pray for her and my mother."

As Julian of Norwich said, why is it the way it is? If we are to love everyone, why on earth didn't God make us lovable? This is a huge theological question.

Is that because people think they are the only ones who are right and smart? Then, God, why didn't you make them less smart and more lovable? To me, having peace with loved ones, especially family members, seems to be more important than

being right on issues.

Our first lesson from 1 John is a beautiful piece of "love lesson" we can ever find in the New Testament. It says, "Beloved, let's love one another; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God; no one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us... Those, who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen."

Yes, this is a powerful teaching.

But question is, "How do you do that?"

We all know how important it is to love; we all know why we need to love; we even know what the consequences of not loving.

But why do we not do it? What is it that keeps us from practicing it in our daily living?

Why do we hate rather than love? Why are we divided rather than united? Why do we judge rather than try to understand?

I think these are the hardest questions we can ever answer to, not just us but all human beings.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus gives us a very simple answer. "Abide in me," he says, "as I abide in you."

Abide. What is it? The Greek word for this English word is *menein*, which means "remain" or "stay." That means, we need to stay in Jesus; we need to remain in him, not outside of him but inside of him.

But before we do that, the first thing we need is come into him first; Jesus' door is always open; it is open to everyone and it is open all the time.

Jesus never closes his door; he is always ready to welcome us and take us in; but we close our doors anytime we like to. That is who we are.

So come to Jesus first; knock on his door first; he is always there waiting for us. Once you come in, don't try to go out even when someone within you tells you to do so. Personally, I don't know how many different selves I have within myself; they always tempt me to do things I would regret doing later.

So, stay there, remain there, abide in Jesus; be patient; do look around; just close your eyes and don't try to say anything; be open to what God leads you!

The Lord Jesus will help you with fresh minds and lovable spirits.

I don't know much about grapes and their trees. But I have seen some of the grapevines here and there. One thing I noticed was this: whenever I looked closely those grapevines, I saw how intertwined the many branches were, winding their way around one another; many times you cannot really tell where one branch starts or another one ends.

But one thing we cannot deny is this: the little branches are touching each other intimately and share nutrients together. It doesn't matter where they come from and where they end, they are all parts of this one vine.

I know some branches will bear better looking and tastier

grapes depending upon the care they got.

But here is the main thing: they all get their nutrients from one source: the vine.

The vine is what sustains those branches; the vine is the life force of the whole plant.

Jesus says that He is the vine. And we are the branches.

There are many different kinds of grapes and wines that come out of those grapes. Colors may be different, tastes may be different, names may be different, but they all come from one farmer, which is God.

No matter what color and names they have, they are all good fruits the farmer is proud of.

Friends, we are all this farmer's great fruits. We are all connected to one vine, which is Jesus. Sometimes stormy weather makes the branches get on each other's nerves. But remember we cannot afford to get cut off from the main vine. We are all connected one way or another and we need to love and put up with one another.

Love does not have colors; love does not know names; love does not have nationalities; love does not even have religious differences; love has just one thing-- that is love itself which we find when we are connected to Jesus.

Jesus says "Abide in me as I abide in you." Jesus' love for us is there all the time, no matter what; as we try to get connected to him and his love, I think we can certainly do things we couldn't do otherwise, which is love others. Amen.