Our scripture this morning comes from John 15:1-6. While you’re finding that, a pastor visited a man who’d not been to church in a great while. He had many excuses and the preacher knew he would hear them. While sitting in front of the fireplace, the man angrily asked, “Preacher, what good does it do to attend church? I can be with God all by myself.” The preacher didn’t answer. Instead, he used his cane to roll a single ember from the center of the fire. It lay on the stone, bright red hot, faded to orange, faded more to gray, and then went out. The preacher then rolled it back into the center of the fire, where it glowed red hot once again. He stood, shook the man’s hand, and started for the door. The man said behind him, “Thank you for that fiery sermon Preacher. I’ll see you Sunday.” People have their excuses and they always sound pretty good. But you see, coming to church is never about somebody else – it’s about you, abiding in Jesus.

**John 15:1-6 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5“I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.**

 We’ve been studying discipleship these last few weeks. In order to be a close disciple of Jesus, we must abide in Him. He makes that very clear in John 15. No one grows apart from close fellowship with Jesus! We abide by studying Jesus teachings, praying, being in fellowship with likeminded believers, serving one another, and witnessing to the lost.

 What does abide mean? In our world today, it can mean obey – abide by the rules, tolerate – abide someone’s behavior. When Jesus said abide, it had a strong meaning! It didn’t just mean tolerate My rules – it meant stay in Me, remain tied to Me, draw everything from Me, make Me your source! Notice in verse 4 it says – Abide in Me… but then it says – and I in you. This shows relationship. We abide in Jesus, but Jesus abides in us. We remain strongly attached to Jesus and He remains strongly attached to us. Have you ever considered that the Creator of the universe is abiding in you? Have you taken the time today to know that the Holy Spirit is indwelling you… remaining strong in you… not fading away in you?

You are a branch grafted into the true Vine through Jesus. When we accept Jesus, truly accept Him, more than just knowing of Him, but knowing Him… giving our lives to Him, we are grafted in. A grafted branch depends on the Vine for everything! Water is a function of the Vine, food is a function of the Vine, life is a function of the Vine. I wonder sometimes if we grasp what Jesus is truly saying in verses 4 through 6 – how completely dependent we are on Him for our salvation, our deliverance and our provision in life. We can do nothing outside of Him. Without His indwelling presence, our best efforts are dead efforts, our greatest deeds are dead deeds, our greatest love is dead love.

In verse 5, Jesus gives us a terse reminder. I am the Vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. Often, people get this upside down – In their heart, they think that they are the vine… and Jesus is the branch. Jesus is clear – Cut Jesus off from any one of us and Jesus keeps right on existing. He’s eternal and will be there whether we’re there or not. Cut us off from Jesus and we wither and die. Go outside and take a knife and cut a branch from one of your bushes – lay it on the ground and look to see whether the bush dries up or the branch.

John 1:1 says - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:14 tells us And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Jesus, the very Living Word of God, Maker of all things, Root of all Life, the very Fabric of the Universe, chooses to abide in us… apart from Him, there is no root… apart from Him, there is no light… apart from Him, there is no water. Peter, in John 6:68 asks the question that we all must ask when we consider how we abide in Jesus - But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Without Jesus, to whom shall we go? Jesus says – without Me, you shall surely die.

In the coming weeks, we’ll look at abiding in Jesus through prayer and fellowship and through service and witness. This week, think about what abiding in Jesus means to you… are you just obeying a set of rules… Well, I prayed a few minutes, read a little Bible, said nice things to my neighbor… I’m abiding. Or does it mean drawing everything from Him and depending wholly on His Grace – is it a relationship that you know you can’t do without and you need Him so badly that, if you don’t have Him, you’ll wither and die? Are you holding on loosely or are you clinging desperately, waiting expectantly, and seeking to serve joyfully?

If you don’t know Jesus, come right now and accept Him as Savior. He will come to abide in you, while you abide in Him. Perhaps you know Him, but you’re withering – come and recommit your life to the True Vine today – don’t be a branch that bears no fruit. Be a branch God prunes to bear even more fruit all the days of your life.