Farewell service, La Côte Church | 25 October 2026

Abide in Me

Ephesians 4:1–7; Psalm 28; John 15:1–9

Jesus says, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower.” What a fitting image for this moment in the life of La Côte Church.

We know the vines on these hillsides so well. At this time of year they’re turning golden as they slope down towards Lac Léman. Our church community also stretches across the border into France, among some of the world’s great vineyards and wine producers. For sixteen years I have worn this green stole, decorated with vines and plum-coloured grapes, a reminder of the fruit that becomes the wine we share at Communion.

Vines are resilient, but they do not escape the seasons. They endure frost, wind, heavy rain, scorching sun and drought. So it has been with us.

Together we have lived through different seasons, profound changes in the world: the arrival of refugees, Brexit, the Covid pandemic, wars and the suffering they bring, and growing concern for our fragile planet and for the impact of AI for good and ill. This year we have witnessed high levels of civil unrest across Europe, including France most recently, with people demanding change for the good.

Many of us have experienced personal losses as well as sharing in great joy and celebration. Through all these seasons, we have tried, most often imperfectly, to respond to God’s call with faith, hope and love, alongside other churches and members of our community.

And today, here, as we enter another season of change, Jesus gives us an invitation that is both simple and profound: “Abide in me and abide in my love.”

“Abide” is not a word we use very often. It means remain, stay, tarry, make your home. Jesus is saying: Stay close to me. Draw your life from me, as a branch draws its life from the vine.

Jesus spoke these words to his friends as his death approached. They were anxious about what lay ahead. He did not promise that life would be easy or that nothing would change. Instead, he promised them a living connection with himself.

The image of the vine was familiar to his Jewish listeners. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Israel is described as a vine planted and tended by God. Now Jesus says, “I am the true vine.” In him, God’s invitation to live in love and to be a blessing to the world is opened afresh.

Jesus also speaks of the vine-grower *tending* the branches so that they bear fruit. There is pruning: (ouch!) – cutting back but also lifting up and training to receive light and grow. That may be uncomfortable. We all have fears, habits and blind spots that can get in the way of abiding in God’s love. Yet the point is not that we must make ourselves fruitful by sheer effort. A branch cannot produce grapes by trying harder. It bears fruit because it remains connected to the vine. Jesus’ primary calling is to remain connected to his love… the fruit will follow.

That is certainly a message I have needed to hear myself, as I have wrestled with the wrench of leaving you and leaving this beautiful region – together with some personal losses. I have also felt fearful about what lies ahead, especially when I received a rather daunting worship rota!

Jesus’ words have landed with fresh poignancy: “Abide in me; abide in my love.” “Carolyn, you do not have to find all the strength on your own. Nor do you have to prove yourself.” The same goes for this community. Jesus commands us to abide in him, in his love. Allow the life of the Holy Spirit to nourish and sustain you and help you grow, even in this season of change. (or any season that you are facing personally).

So how do we abide in Christ? Today’s readings offer us two practical answers: CONNECTION - through prayer and worship, and secondly COMMUNITY - through our life together.

First, through CONNECTION - prayer. Psalm 28 begins with an urgent cry for help. The psalmist does not hide fear or distress, but *turns towards* God, “to you I call, O Lord my rock.” He calls God to account: “Be my security when everything else feels uncertain.” We don’t have to appease God with pleasantries. God wants our honest cries. Christina K – Church warden of the Anglican chaplaincy in Kiev pointed out this week that much of the Bible was written by people in distress. The psalmists shows us how to do honest lament when we face loss and change, even defiant prayer for the way things are.

Later in the psalm, the writer moves towards thanksgiving. It might not mean that everything is now ok – but simply that the psalmist has grasped that God is still the strength and shield of God’s people – in the change and challenge they are facing.

Today, we abide in the Vine, in Christ’s love, when we turn to God in honest prayer, protest, lament – not just as individuals – but as a community. The psalmist concludes: “The Lord is the strength of *his people* – Save *your people* and bless your inheritance; shepherd them, and carry them for ever.”

Which brings us to a second way of abiding in Christ – in COMMUNITY - through our life together. In Ephesians, Paul urges the church to live with “all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

This is more than an instruction to play nicely! It is a description of what happens when God’s costly love shapes a community, in other words, when we are rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3.17).

We belong not only to Christ but also to one another. This means making room for differences, being patient when relationships are difficult, and choosing forgiveness and peace.

The chaplaincy in Kyiv this week described the importance of worshipping together, (the so-called ordinary every Sunday worship), in long-term conflict and uncertainty. The church warden explained that singing and praying together lifts people’s spirits, recalls them to

faith and helps them not to feel alone. It helps them stay connected to God's love, together.

I am only too aware of the wonderful mix of gatherings that have taken place in this community and that help us abide in God's love together. Our worship, singing and making music together, sharing meals (Advent lunch coming up!) gathering to pray, to discuss and ask questions, to create, (so many "crafty" people among us!) and to care in many practical ways – a call, a cup of tea, a food shop, to encourage one another. Members of our community love joining in God's mission in their workplaces, families and neighbourhoods, and with others – to serve the wider community – especially the most vulnerable - eg through Coup de Main – the Lost Food Project – Restos du Coeur and our Play Group.. and our wider fragile home.

This abiding in Christ – as a community - will matter especially in the months ahead, as La Côte enters a liminal period between chaplains. There may be questions, decisions and moments of uncertainty. But the life of this church does not depend on one person. Its life comes from Christ, the True Vine. As you remain rooted in him, you can continue to grow together and bear fruit – as we have done over many years together.

I am equally thankful for our partnerships with other churches, traditions, and faith groups. We also belong to the wider Diocese in Europe that stretches from Norway to Turkey to North Africa!

Let's hold on to this vision that we are part of something much bigger than ourselves, supported by the prayers and companionship of fellow Christians across many countries.

Thank you to everyone here today, from La Côte Church and from the wider community. Thank you for your encouragement, your wisdom, your questions and doubts, your courage and tenacity, your humour, and your willingness to walk alongside one another. Thank you for the generous love you have shown to me and David and our family.

Farewells are never easy. We shall miss you, and we shall miss this place. But the image of the vine offers us hope. Branches may grow in different directions; seasons may change; there will be times of pruning and new growth. Yet the source of love and life remains the same.

Jesus says to us all: “I am the true vine. Abide in me and abide in my love.” Stay close to Christ. Keep praying. Keep meeting together and bearing with one another in love. Keep looking outwards – engaging with God’s loving purposes in the wider world. Trust that God’s Spirit will continue to nourish you and bring forth fruit.

And in the words of the hymn we shall sing, let’s pray:

“Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of Heav'n to Earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling” here, together, and wherever God calls us next.

Amen.