

John 15: 1-11  
“A Wordle of Faith”  
January 30, 2022  
Rev. Lou Nyiri

**[title slide]**

This morning’s message is based upon John 15:1-11, let’s lean in & listen...to God’s word for us this day...

**[scripture slides]**

**Jesus the True Vine**

**15** “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. **2** He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes<sup>[a]</sup> to make it bear more fruit. **3** You have already been cleansed<sup>[b]</sup> by the word that I have spoken to you. **4** Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. **5** I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. **6** Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. **7** If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **8** My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become<sup>[c]</sup> my disciples. **9** As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. **10** 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. **11** I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

**Let us Pray:**

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.  
Come as the fire and burn,  
Come as the wind and cleanse,  
Come as the light and reveal,  
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:  
That the words of my mouth  
And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,  
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

**[Title slide]**

**Sermon**

Do you wordle?

By now, there’s a good chance you’ve seen friends or family posting to social media their five-box lines of empty squares or squares filled with a question-mark.

Perhaps it’s been a cryptic twitter post made up of little green, yellow and gray boxes – in each case you read the word “Wordle” then a three digit number and a fraction in sixths.

Have you wondered what this whole wordle thing is about?

**[slide – mastermind]**

Did you play the board-and-peg game Mastermind as a kid, well, it’s like that only with words.

You get one chance each day to play the game - & - everyone who plays it daily is playing the same game as you.

No one knows why it took off the way it has in the last couple of weeks – it just has – and I’m hooked.

**[slide – “weary – pilot – vague”]**

The brief explanation of the game is this: You have six chances to guess a five-letter word.

With each guess, the game tells you which letters are correct letters in the right spot (green squares), which letters are correct letters in wrong spots (yellow squares), and which letters are not in the word at all (gray squares).

**[slide – LIGHT & GLOAT]**

For instance, if LIGHT is the word and you guess GLOAT, you get yellow-yellow-gray-gray-green squares – it tells you the word has an L and a G, but not in those spots – you also know that T is the last letter in the word you’re trying to guess.

**[slide – multi wordle posts “waffle house”]**

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Wordle has inspired us to see these matrices everywhere – from memes to art to cross-stitching – the internet has come alive with Wordle posts.

For whatever reason, we’re seeing wordle grids almost every day.

According to one article, the best thing about Wordle’s graphic design is the amount of information packed into the little graph.

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Each Wordle game (and subsequent post) contains an arc of the attempts and [ah-ha moments] by the one playing the game.

Philosophy professor at University of Utah, Thi Nguyen, describes Wordle as, “...a graphically neat synopsis where you can see the whole arc of another’s attempts so quickly.”<sup>1</sup>

**[slide – lee chambers]**

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British psychologist, Lee Chambers, describes the common experience and struggle of the games users as a unifier. Chambers states, “The fact that we are all trying to solve the same puzzle brings us together. There's both a sense of community in terms of 'How difficult did people find it this time?' and a competitive angle in terms of 'How well did I stack up in finding this word compared to everyone else?'”<sup>2</sup>

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Wordle’s creator, says of the game, “The game feels really human and just enjoyable. ... And that really resonates with where we’re at right now in the world and with COVID.”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/heres-why-the-word-game-wordle-went-viral-180979439/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

So, what does all this have to do with faith?

[slide – thi Nguyen]

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Perhaps, Thi Nguyen’s words<sup>3</sup> might help our focus, in an op ed piece, Nguyen writes, “Every day, Wordle gives everyone the same challenge and the same tools to meet that challenge. When you glance at another player’s grid you can grasp the emotional journey they took, from struggle to likely victory, in one tiny bit of their day. All those yellow and green Wordle grids popping up on our screens give us a steady stream of small communions.”

- Livestream come back to sanctuary cameras

Nguyen’s last part resonates with me... “[giving] us a steady stream of small communions.”

[title slide]

As the church we are part of a communion – a fellowship – of believers who gather together to grow, go and share God’s love in this world.

The one thing we can cling to amid what we could call our “common experiences and struggles” is that we are not alone – we have each other & we have one in which we abide who promises to go with us along the way.

It could be said – if you will – that the five-letter Wordle of faith derived from today’s passage is: abide?

To abide is to ‘continue in a place’ to ‘take up residence’ to ‘wait patiently’ – our call as faithful followers is to abide with the one who promises to be with us always & who promises us full life – our call is to abide in Jesus’ love & from that know full life & joy (even if we are living through what might not feel like joyful times).

It is to remain – to stay – to be fully enveloped in, by and through – in this case our abiding is in, by and through Jesus & Jesus’ love.

This morning’s text from John 15 is located in the middle of what is known as *the farewell discourses* (John 14-17) – (of note in John’s gospel this is written in such a way that Jesus is not only speaking to first century disciples...Jesus is speaking these words to those disciples who follow them) – Jesus is teaching followers – **then & now** – about the form of their discipleship. The main themes of these speeches include Jesus’ current presence and his future paradoxical absence; the disciples’ role after Jesus’ imminent departure; and the disciples place in the world. As part of this larger address, our text from John 15 explores, through metaphor, how disciples are to abide in Jesus in reciprocal love.

[slide – heart locks]

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In this way, by exhorting his disciples to “[a]bide in [him]” as he abides in them (15:4), Jesus is addressing their concerns. It is through love that the disciples will be able to abide in him even when they do not see him (16:16), and it is by abiding in him that they are enabled to love one another (15:9-10) because they “can do nothing” without him (15:5).

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/story/2022-01-21/op-ed-wordle-game-minds-play>

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This connection between abiding in “the vine” and love helps illuminate what “bearing fruit” might refer to in this extended metaphor. A branch that bears fruit is a disciple who keeps Jesus’ commandments (15:10), which is summarized in the very next verse after this morning’s text, 15:12: “love one another as I have loved you.” This idea is a restatement of John 14:23, where Jesus says, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” This “home” is the same word used in 14:2, where Jesus describes the “many dwelling places” that are in his Father’s house, and is similar to the verb that is translated “abide” in chapter 15. By following Jesus’ commandments, Jesus’ disciples abide in him, and he and the Father dwell with them.

Reciprocal love between Jesus and the disciples, and among the disciples themselves, is the foundation for the metaphor and exhortation of this portion of Jesus’ farewell discourse. Branches abide in the vine in the same way that disciples abide in Jesus through their obedience to his commandment to love one another. Cyclically, by loving one another, they show themselves to be his disciples (13:35) in the company of those who testify to Jesus, just like them (15:26-27), and therefore, they abide in him.

**[slide – wolfhart pannenberg]**

Wolfhart Pannenberg speaks of love in the following way, “In the present time, faith, hope and love sustain the church, but the greatest is love. It is possible that it is greatest because it is lasting. Love is an ethic that will abide into the future, but one we can practice in the present as well. Love takes up the believer into the act of the nature and operation of God and participates in the movement of the love for the world. [Love] not only mediates but also already constitutes the relationship with God.”<sup>4</sup>

**[slide – Mozart at piano]**

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N.T. Wright tells of a practical joke Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart used to play on his father, Leopold -- who was also a musician. After a night out on the town with his friends, Wolfgang would stumble into the house, sit down at the piano and pound out a rising scale of notes. But he wouldn't finish the scale. He would just get up from the piano bench and go to bed.

Wolfgang knew the unfinished scale would drive his father to restless sleep. Leopold would toss and turn in his bed, until he had to get up, go to the piano and finish the scale his son had started.

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"What we are concerned with here," Wright explains, "is the call of love, and of life itself, as an unfinished scale, going ahead of us into God's future. The music of love, which will one day be completed, is therefore not just our duty. It is our destiny."<sup>5</sup>

As we continue – reside – wait patiently – envelope ourselves & those around us in such love – as we abide in Jesus’ love & generously shower that love into our surrounding communities (family, school, work, wherever we are) – we will know joy that comes from beyond us & completes us – therein lies our hope & our faith.

Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> --Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* Volume 3, 184.

<sup>5</sup> --N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: First Corinthians* (SPCK, 2004), 175-76.