

Sixth Sunday of Easter May 9 2021

John 15:9-17

“I have said these things to you in order that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

Our reading today comes from Jesus' farewell discourse in John, as he is saying goodbye to his disciples to go to the cross. Why are we talking about joy when the topic is you dying? On a cross, no less. What place does joy even have in the midst of pain, suffering, death?

We might wonder the same about our Psalm today. This psalm of praise and encouragement calls upon the lands to shout with joy to the lord and sing! The very seas and rivers and hills will shout with joy and clap their hands when the Lord comes.. to judge. Now, I don't know about you, but the judgement of God, much less any other kind of judgement, is not often received as a joyful occasion. It's like waiting to get your latest paper back in English, only worse.

What do we make of this, talking about joy in such a situation?

Perhaps we ought to consider what we mean by joy. What do you think of when you hear the word joy? What about happiness?

I've had conversations with colleagues that joy is different from happiness. Happiness is momentary. It is brought on by an immediate good cause. We're happy when something goes right! When the touchdown is scored, the homerun is hit, the catch is made. When the report card comes back with a B! When our loved one is surprised by that birthday gift or card. When the yard looks just so after you cut the grass. Happiness is laughter and giggles. That bite of the perfect dessert or meal. A shared inside joke.

Joy though, is something else. Joy is an attitude that settles inside of you. Joy goes bone deep. Happiness can be swept away by any tide of darkness, but joy is anchored in our souls. It is attached not to our flesh, but our spirit.

And because this is so- joy can reside in us, even in the midst of experiences that are decidedly not joyful.

Christina Levasheff, whose young son died of Krabbe disease, put it this way. "Joy, genuine joy, can thrive in the midst of pain. Genuine joy is not a fleeting happiness over life's circumstances.

Genuine joy stems from a deep understanding that God is present with us, loves us.”

She has a point, listen again to that verse, “I have said these things to you in order that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

If the joy of Jesus is in us (and the earlier part of this passage says it is in us... through our abiding in love which comes from our keeping Jesus’ commandments) then our joy is complete. It is filled to the brim.

The key to understanding this passage is that root of the word joy in Greek is *charis*- the same one for grace. With Jesus’ joy/grace in us our own joy/grace is filled to the brim. Joy is that experience of the grace of God in Jesus Christ and all that means for us. This is why we can have joy even in the face of judgement- because we know where we stand with that judge. The same one who John tells us came not to condemn the world but save it. Who came in love. A love embodied in Jesus who will endure suffering and death for us.

Joy can be present with us regardless of life circumstance because joy is the experience of Christ with us. That warmth of

heart and soul that gives us confidence that regardless of what life throws our way all will be well. It is like our mother's warm embrace when we were young. An embrace that can make all the hurt go away. It is this joy, this experience of Christ's presence with us that ultimately gives us peace- for peace is a cousin to joy.

It is this peace that comes from the experience of being filled to the brim with the grace of God in Jesus Christ that led Horatio Spafford to write the poem that became the beloved hymn, *It Is Well With My Soul*. Horatio and his wife Anna had their son die of scarlet fever and then had their four daughters die in an accident at sea. In the midst of this great sorrow almost too heavy to bear, Horatio experienced the grace of God in Jesus, which brought him the peace- dare we say the joy- to be able to say even while grieving- it is well with my soul.

This is why even critics of the early Christian church talked about the joy Christians expressed in all circumstances, even in the face of death. Because we know where we stand with the judge, because we have the joy/grace of Christ.

My friends in Christ, when we keep the commandments of Christ to dwell in his Word (written and spoken), to love one another (in speech and action), we abide in the love of God in Jesus Christ.

When we dwell in that truth, that reality, the joy/grace of Christ will fill us to the brim.

And in the joy, that grace of Christ, we will find peace. A peace that nothing on earth can touch. And when we have that peace – it starts a chain reaction, because we ourselves will be able to better love others with the same love that God in Jesus has shown us. And they will abide in that love, be filled to the brim with that joy and it will be made complete.

This joy, this peace, comes not from us but from the God who chose us in Jesus Christ and it comes in order that we may love one another.

Come and experience the visible sign of this love of God in our Meal today. Dwell in the Word of God daily so that you may be filled to overflowing with Christ's joy/grace. So that you too might have that deep understanding that God is present with you and loves you. Loves you when you walk with Jesus and when you walk away. Loves you when you keep God's commandments and when you break them. Loves you to the moon and back. Loves you, always. And this, my friends, is the Joy of Jesus, to share that love and grace with those whom he loves.