

Christ's Joy, Our Joy
John 15:9-17
Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 9, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Two forms of "context" help our meditation this morning. First, whether it be Jesus' actual setting of the Upper Room on the night of his betrayal, or our 'church calendar' setting of the Sunday before Ascension Day, there's a sense of impending departure, isn't there? Jesus' time with his disciples is short... the days of Eastertide are drawing to a close. A visible separation is on the horizon.

A second form of context: As our Gospel Reading continues with subsequent verses of last Sunday's text, we should expect to hear (and build on) various phrases and doctrinal themes from the same. And, the very first verse of our Reading does not disappoint!: Jesus says, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." There's that repeated theme, just as we've heard the last two Sundays... that relationship between the Father, the Son whom He has sent, and those whose hope is in that Son and whose love is of that adopted Father! And, continue on and you hear another repeated theme: "Abide in my love." There's the one command – remain with Christ, at all costs. And then, in words we'll get back to, he again repeats the

relationship theme by again mirroring our love to him with his love to the Father: “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.” We’ll come back to what that means, but – for now – notice the repetition of that tri-fold relationship theme... and then, as a reminder that this is the same conversation we meditated upon last week, we hear these words at the end of our reading: “I chose you and appointed you **that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.**”

There it is! In a sense, we have not moved on from last week’s meditation. Our life is found in Christ Jesus... he the vine, his Father the vinedresser, the vinedresser adoring not merely the root and stem of the vine, but every branch that bears fruit: “I am the vine, you are the branches,” Jesus says.

But within all that repetition, there is some progression in thought and verbiage we didn’t hear last week. Last week, there wasn’t really any straightforward talk of *how* one remains in Christ. This week, Jesus says it plainly: go back to those words I first glanced past, “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.”

This, at first, may sound “un-Lutheran” to us, **if we** mistakenly follow the historical misconception that Lutherans only preach about justification by grace alone. But, though justification by

grace alone received through faith alone on the merits of Christ alone – though that *is* the chief article and focus – there’s so much more to our Confessions (and, to the Scriptures) than justification. Ironically, those who claim Lutherans will have trouble with Jesus’ words, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love” do so because they’ve mistakenly heard these words through the lens of justification. Jesus does not say, “If you keep my commandments, you will gain my love.” He says, “If you keep my commandments, you will *abide in* my love.” But, recall, “Already you are clean (pruned) because of my words.” So, we can’t read the question, “How is one justified?” into our text.

Rather, Jesus says, this is how one bears fruit... this is how one remains attached to the Vine: that one keeps the commandments, the teachings, the doctrine of the Vine. Is this so difficult to agree to? Would anyone say, the Christ was remaining true to His identity and mission and purpose if that Christ openly defied the will of the Father? No. Rather, “... just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” Did Christ not even pray: “Not my will, but Thine be done”? And didn’t he count it his great joy to delight in and do the will of his Father?

Then how can we read his words to us any differently?: “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.” When one trusts the relationship, when one cherishes the love, does he not rejoice in the will of that loving relationship, even if it uses the word

“commandment”? Indeed, as those redeemed and purchased by the blood and sacrifice of Christ, we may learn his commandments with the greatest of joy, for they express to us his holy will for our relationship with him, His Church, and His Father. In fact, the sinner only reads the Holy Ten with a cringing cynicism if the sinner is trying to justify himself by them! But, Christ’s words *assume a relationship* because he has already made us clean by the water and Spirit and blood that testify to our salvation in his substitutionary life, suffering, and death. Thus, we may now read these commandments as his good and holy will for daily life.” It’s not for our justification... it’s for our life as branches. The Ten Commandments are not a garden tool of justifying, but a garden tool of abiding. If you want your life to be a blessed one (and blessed doesn’t mean loaded up with goodies and creature comforts... it means one that is nurtured, pruned and sustained by the Vinedresser)... if you want to remain in that most blessed relationship, then remain in Christ. No matter the hardship that comes, no matter the materialism you are tempted to chase after, no matter the untouchable reputation you are assigned by the world... cherish his holy will; cherish his precious doctrine; for *there* is your life and your joy.

How does Christ himself say it: “These things I have spoken to you, *that my joy may be in you*” – by his own testimony, Jesus’ greatest joy is the holy will of the Father – (and then, Jesus continues), “[that my joy may be in you], **and that your joy may be**

full.” What a statement! I don’t have to try and sell you on the commandments, because the Christ himself – the one who laid down his life for you and loves only the Father more than he loves you – that same Jesus has said exactly what will make your joy full: cherishing His Word, cherishing His holy will, and that means, even cherishing his commandments.

There is your fullness of joy, because – now freed from the curse of the Law by Christ – you do not hear them and live them as if having to justify yourself by them, but because you know these are the Words of the Father who has loved you so that He gave His only begotten, that you might be His dear adopted. And He wants nothing more than for you to share His joy... and thus, he gives you his holy will and says, “This is the very best and most perfect will, the divine will, for your life.” Or, as the psalmist praises, “You make known to me the paths of life (doctrine); in your presence is fullness of joy.”

Now, you might say, “Really? His commandments and doctrine bring me the fullness of joy? I doubt that! I’d have much more joy if I could live how I wanted.” Oh really? Let’s look at the whole history of case studies we have for trying to define and live out our own joy. Need we go back to the to the smiting of Sodom or the lost tribes of Israel or even the ruin of Rome? We have an entire society around us, which – the further it runs from God’s holy law and the more it pretends to have its *own* version of “fullness of joy” – the more we scratch our heads at its so-obvious foolishness, the

more we hold our noses as its blatantly unjust ‘wisdom of justice,’ the more we see that its scientists are – almost in a schizophrenia – ignoring the truth of the Creator while depending on the knowledge of the Creation’s good order to try and play God, and the more we attempt to shield our eyes from its rot and decay, its increasing rates of suicide and self-mutilation, its tone-deafness for those crying out for help, and – in the place of that help – a faux cheering on of all things confused, disoriented, dystopian... all in the name of and pretend joy of a godless utopia independent of the love of God and His Christ.

Is that– the fakery of the emperor who wears no clothes – is that the joy you seek? Or do you now hear Jesus’ words plainly: “Abide in my love... These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” That’s why our epistle reading says, “This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.”

Pure doctrine in a messy world not only makes sense of the messy world; it also relieves the burden, the bitterness, the anxiety and fear... and brings the fullness of joy into (and despite) the messy world. The apostle John confesses as much when he says in his *epistle*, (and listen to these themes we’ve heard repeated so much in the Gospel these past two weeks) “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is **with the Father and with his**

Son, Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.” (same phrase as our text!)

Notice, how John’s epistle goes from joy in one’s salvation, to (as a *fruit* of that) the love toward my neighbor (and, especially the love grounded in and flowing from the fellowship with my fellow Christian) ... that love that wants them to forever remain in the love of Christ, the truth of his Word, and the fullness of joy his pure doctrine gives. And, out of that joy that produces such love, will I put limitations on loving my brother in Christ? Jesus says, “love one another as I have loved you.” Christ put no limitations on his love for us and his desire to share his joy with us, that our joy may be full... why would I now put limitations on sharing that pure doctrine and that fullness of joy with my spouse, my sibling, my parent or child, my fellow Christian in the pew. It’s that pure doctrine that will bring holy living to our lives and joy to cherish with one another, even as the world around us crumbles in its godless decay.

But to remain in that, to abide in that, means not only that we don’t long for the foolish rot and decay of this world’s idolatry, but – being surrounded by it, even still having our Old Adam, who hangs around our necks, trying to keep us enslaved to it, namely to the idol of myself and my own interests – remaining in and abiding in Christ’s Word and joy and love means being willing to suffer at the hands of this world to keep myself and my brother fixed upon, focused upon Christ’s joy, Christ’s love, Christ’s Holy Word: “Greater

love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.” Do I have to envision that myself? No, the epistle reading says clearly: “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.” Cherish those Ten Commandments and seek to live all of life by them, and the godless world will give you plenty of opportunity to feel like you’re laying down your life for your friend.

Jesus doesn’t leave you to interpret what that means, but he continues, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” In other words, If you recall that Jesus laid down his life for you, if you rejoice in that good news that while we were yet his enemies, Christ died for us, shared his joy with us, baptized us into the adoption of sons and brotherhood and *friend*... then live the joy of his holy will, even if it means suffering for that confession... for that confession under suffering will show true love to one another – not the world’s imposed love, not the world’s “woke commandments,” not the world’s bending the knee to BLM and to the censors’ cries of ‘heresy’ upon all things that uphold male and female – no, that *fake* love of complying to foolishness you will not be showing one another, but – hold fast in Christ to his pure doctrine – and you show one another **true** love... indeed, point one another to and help each other define life by the love of Christ that was willing to suffer the loss of his own life for the sake of yours.

This is why Jesus no longer calls you servants, but friends... for, as he says, “the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends; for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” You *know* what Christ has done; you *know* what he continues to do for and among you at his pulpit and altar. You *know* what His promises are and what the finish line will be. He has not left you in the dark as servants, but has shared with you the fullness of joy of the Church’s salvation, that your joy may be complete... no matter the suffering you must bear at the hands of the world.

But that suffering – that willingness to stand firm in pure doctrine for the sake of loving one another – that suffering nevertheless carries with it inexpressible joy... for you know your suffering is not unto uncertain hopes for justification; rather, your suffering, your standing firm, your daily life confession is in the certainty of already completed justification on account of the Christ next to whom no one can show greater love... for he laid down his life for his enemies, and he welcomed you as friend and brother when his Father adopted you into the family, that he may share with us the joy of his holy will, a seat at the family table, and even his own inheritance in the life of the world to come.

In Nomine Iesu
+ AMEN +

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