



Pentecost 11

August 20, 2017 – 9:30 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: Find Your Joy in Jesus' Love!

Sermon Text: John 15:9-17

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.”

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Jesus wants every Christian to be filled with joy! So how come joy is such a rare commodity for many of us? What conditions or thoughts do we let steal the joy Jesus desires for His blood-bought children? Do we let worries and cares eat us up and filch our joy or let broken relationships destroy our contentment? Do we stew over possibilities or bear grudges? Too often we're too riveted to the past or preoccupied with the future to feel the joy Jesus offers us in the moment. What's the cure? What's the **"this"** Jesus refers to when He tells The Twelve, **"I've told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete"**?

Before Jesus spoke to His disciples about joy, He told them: **"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."** Joy comes from trusting that Jesus loves us *just like* the heavenly Father loves Him. That's huge! It also comes from keeping His commands. He says: **"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."** Jesus even defines love for us: **"greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."** The kind of love Jesus looks for in us is the exact same kind of love He demonstrated day in and day out in their behalf: an unconditional, self-sacrificing, boundless, no-strings-attached, forgiving love.

Because He loves us so much, Jesus *orders* us to have His kind of love for others. The result will be a joyful life. It isn't a difficult formula in principle—just in practice. When our lives lack joy, it's because we've left something out of the formula. We've forgotten how much Jesus loves us. Pastor Paul told his beloved flock in Ephesus: **"I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God"** (3:17b-19). We can't manufacture Christ-like love for others. Like faith, like forgiveness, like the certain hope of everlasting life, love, too, is God's priceless gift, wrapped up in the gospel of His grace and hand-delivered by His Spirit.

Love and joy go together like sushi and wasabi. In **Gal. 5:22**, Paul's list of **"the fruit of the Spirit"** begins with **"love, joy"** and **"peace."** Jesus' love brings us a deep, abiding joy—and fills our soul with the **"peace of God, which transcends all understanding"** and **"guards our hearts and minds in"** Him (Phil. 4:7). Just before leaving the upper room on the night He was betrayed, Jesus promised His disciples of every age: **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid"** (John 14:27). Southwest Airlines offers low-cost **"Wanna Get Away?"** fares, hoping to entice potential customers to jet off for a brief respite from life's stresses. Ever **"wanna get away"**? Who doesn't? But instead of travelling to some exotic locale, **"let your fingers do the walking"** in God's Word, where Jesus tenderly invites you: **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"** (Matt. 11:28).

Accept that invitation. True rest, genuine contentment, a real sense of calm amid life's storms does exist—even though it may not seem like it does for those of us who get bent out of shape over some pretty minor things or who foresee the worst possible outcomes for what appear to be intractable situations.

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Jesus asks us, **“Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?”** (Matt. 6:27). **“Do not worry”** is one of Jesus’ most frequent commands. It’s also one of the hardest to obey. Worry comes naturally. We say we just can’t help it. But we can. We say it’s just part of who we are—and it is. It’s part of who we are *by nature*, before Christ set up shop in our hearts thru His Spirit. We justify worry by saying that Jesus wants us to think responsibly about the future. But there’s a huge difference between being responsible and being worried. And as much as we claim to admire people who don’t worry, we may criticize them as being “too laid back” or lacking a serious outlook on life. We might even consider them to be lazy or irresponsible.

Our problem with worry is a heart issue. It’s all about whether we’ve ceded control to God. Have we sincerely surrendered ourselves to Him? Do we truly trust Him to take care of us and meet our needs? Are we convinced that His will for us is always in our best interests so that He works all things out for our good like He promises to do in His Word? Do we really value His “big-picture” approach to life, or are we constantly craving the details we think we need to relax or move ahead? Do we believe God when He tells us through the prophet Isaiah?

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways & my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to my empty, but will accomplish what I desire & achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (55:8-11)

When we worry, it begs the question, “Am I really accepting Jesus’ lordship, or not? If we’ve really submitted to Him, then we trust that our life is in His hands, and *whatever* He chooses to do with it is all right with us, even if it’s difficult. The plan is His, the means to live it are His and the outcomes are His. That’s what surrender’s all about. And if we’ve really surrendered, we’re not worried about it. Are we in a difficult place right now? If so, we have a choice to make. We can trust that it’s either *God’s* difficult place—or a place from which He’ll soon provide deliverance—or we can wonder if He’s lost His grip on our life and let us wander too far away from His presence and too far astray from His good and gracious will. The only issue is what our heart chooses to believe about God and His promises. As my wife often says, **“You either believe, or you don’t.”** Or as a magnet on our fridge puts it: **“Good morning, this is God. I will be handling all your problems today. I will not need your help. So, have a miraculous day!”** (Shirley Erlandsen, scribe)

Genuine joy is found in Jesus’ love for us, a love St. John defines for us like this: **“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins”** (1 John 4:10). Or as St. Paul states in Romans 5:8: **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** God’s love has no limits; it knows no bounds; it’s sufficient to meet all our needs; it’s full and free; gracious and forgiving; merciful and mighty!

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And the more I revel in it—the more I really let it sink in that Jesus was willing to die for *me* despite the harm I’ve done, the hurt I’ve caused and the opportunities I’ve passed up to be a blessing to others in need—the more I realize how much God loves me despite my sins and weaknesses, my failings and my failures to love as He loves me. God’s grace—His underserved love for this unworthy sinner—is truly astounding to contemplate. It calms my troubled heart; it stills my soul; and “puts a smile on my face for the whole human race” as my mom used to say after telling me that if I stuck my lip out any farther, a little bird would come and perch on it!

Jesus wants every Christian to be filled with joy! So how come joy is such a rare commodity for many of us? Because we make the pursuit of joy an end in itself. We think that to have joy, something must happen to change our circumstances. Or something must heal our past wounds. So, we focus on the circumstances, the wounds or some other source of discomfort—and we have no trouble finding those! All the while Jesus asks us to look past the surface of our joylessness and major on love—specifically, His love for us. When we do, the circumstances, wounds and all other sources of discomfort become irrelevant. Joy in Jesus overcomes them. And our joy is complete! With grateful hearts and crystal-clear consciences, we love as Jesus loves us; we sacrifice our needs and interests to meet the needs and interests of others; we forgive as we’ve been forgiven; and we offer our time, talents and treasures for the growth of God’s kingdom and for the good of others. Need some joy? Hurting for some love? Worried or upset? Repent! Then rejoice—in Jesus! Amen.

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