

Sixth Sunday of Easter – May 6, 2018
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

John 15:9-17 (NIV)

"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.

How would you complete the sentence, "Happiness is..."? Maybe you'd agree with Fred Adler, who proclaimed, "**Happiness is a positive cash flow.**" It seems his thoughts conflict with those found on an inspirational calendar: "**Remember that the happiest people are not those getting more, but those giving more.**" ~ H. Jackson Brown (Life's Little Instruction Calendar, 1999)

Then there are those who find happiness in their relationships. George Burns is quoted as saying: "**Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family --- in another city.**" Or how about this one by Tom Bodett; "**They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy in this world. Someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for.**" Actually I kind of like that one!

It was St. Augustine who said, "**Indeed, man wishes to be happy even when he so lives as to make happiness impossible.**" Apart from Christ – man's quest for true joy is futile as we are reminded in our text for today in which Jesus graciously offers us

Theme: Two Keys to A Joy-Filled Life

1. Remaining in Jesus Love
2. Experiencing Jesus' Friendship

Our text is a portion of the conversation that Jesus shared with his disciples on the evening before his crucifixion. These words continue a thought that was introduced in our Gospel lesson from last week in which Jesus declared, "I am the vine, you are the branches." With those words, Jesus reminds us that just as a branch needs to be connected to its vine and to remain in it to be productive, so we need to be connected to him and remain in him to be productive followers. As our text for today begins, Jesus reminds his apostles of his love for them: "**As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.**"

The Father loved Jesus with a perfect love – this wasn't just the love of friendship or an emotional kind of love. The Father's love was highest type of love possible – a love which is sure, steadfast, heartfelt, warm, constant. That's the kind of love which promotes joy and happiness and it's the kind of love that Jesus wants us to enjoy. What a blessing it is to enjoy the love of the Son of God. No matter what we experience as we go through this life on our way to heaven – the love of Jesus assures us that it is for our benefit and eternal happiness.

Jesus has chosen us to be the recipients of his love. In our text he explains how we can remain in his 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.**

If Jesus would have refused to follow the will of his heavenly Father his Father would not have been pleased with him. The Father's love would have been lost. We will lose the blessings of the love of Christ if we do not follow his commands because those commands are intended for our benefit. We remain in Jesus' love by obeying his commands. This obedience flows from faith. As we live our faith, we are living under the love of Christ.

Why is it that Jesus wants us to be obedient to his commands and to live in his love? It is so that we can have joy. **I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.** A religious writer by the name of Paul Dunn, wrote; **"Happiness is in knowing and completely understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ."**

His statement stands in sharp contrast to many of the happiness statements suggested by the world. Contrary to what the unbelieving world thinks, true and lasting joy really does come from knowing and serving a loving Savior. While the unbeliever often seeks joy in the pursuit of sinful pleasures – Jesus reminds us that real, complete joy is found only in him – our living and loving Savior.

Jesus has told us that if we obey his commands, we will remain in his love. Now he summarizes his commands for us with a single word. **My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.** In Romans 13, the apostle Paul reminds us of the Lord's commands that deal with our relationships with each other. (Romans 13:9-10 NIV) **The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.**

Frequently when Moses shared God's will with the OT nation of Israel he would remind them to: **love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws or to love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him.**

The Lord Jesus put the commandments in perspective for us when he said: (Matthew 22:37-40 NIV) **Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."**

This love is more than just words, it's actions. Over and over again the apostle John in his epistles repeats the thoughts of Jesus' words in our text encouraging us to love each other as a reflection of Christ's love for us. Just scan through 1 John later today or sometime in the coming week and you'll discover the word love used 35 different times.

In our text Jesus explains what it means to love each other as he loved us. **Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends**

With these words, Jesus states a general truth. The ultimate sacrifice that someone could make to show his love would be to give up his life for someone. Jesus made that sacrifice for us the day after he spoke the words of this text when he offered his life for sinners on the cross. There Jesus did more than just lay down his physical life. There he was separated from the love of his Father as he endured the punishment of hell for the sins of the world. It is this act of love on his part that guarantees us forgiveness and the wonderful privilege of being called children of God and friends of Jesus. It is Jesus' love for us that assures us of a life of joy for time and for eternity.

You are my friends if you do what I command. With these words Jesus is not telling people how to become his friends. He speaks to those who have become his friends through faith. Only the person who in faith

receives the love of Jesus is able to love others as Jesus loved them. John explains it like this; **We love because he first loved us.** (1 John 4:19)

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.

It seems presumptuous to think of being Jesus' friends when we don't even deserve to be his slaves. Still Jesus calls us servants and gives us the privilege of serving him with our lives. But he does not regard us as mere servants – he has taken us into his confidence, revealing to us everything he has learned from the Father.

Like the apostles, we are more than servants. We are friends of Jesus because Jesus has revealed to us the words of his heavenly Father – the truth of our salvation and in faith we have believed them.

All people need and want friends. What a blessing it is for those who in faith have Jesus as their friend! He is the one friend who is always there when we need him. He is the one friend who completely knows and understand us. He is the one friend who never fails to give the right advice to us through his word. He is the one friend who will receive us into a heavenly home.

We are friends of Jesus. That certainly is something to think about! How did we become his friends? It's not that we reach out to him. It's not that we did something for him. No, it's because he stooped down to reach out to us and did something for us. In his grace he chose us as he reminded the apostles in our text; **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last.**

So it is with all believers. By nature they were spiritually dead, blind and enemies of God. They had neither the desire nor the ability to come to faith in Jesus and become his friend. But Jesus in his grace chose them and brought them to faith through his word. Like the apostles all believers are chosen for a purpose. Jesus chooses believers to live fruitful Christian lives for him. What meaning and challenge that puts into our lives. What fruit could be more lasting than sharing the love of Jesus with others? What command of Jesus has more lasting results than his great commission to make disciples of all nations.

Jesus reminds us that because we are his friends we are not alone when it comes to living fruitful lives. We can tap into the resources of our heavenly Father. One of the results of being chosen by Jesus as his friends is that we can pray to the heavenly Father in Jesus' name. **The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.**

This is an important and valuable blessing as we carry out our Savior's purpose for our lives. Prayer is one of the great blessings that every believer enjoys. In time of need or difficulty the believer can turn to his heavenly Father. When a believer prays in Jesus' name – that means trusting in Jesus as his Savior and requesting those things which are in keeping with his will – it will always be given to us.

Jesus has told us these things to make our joy complete. Our joy is based on Jesus' love for sinners. That love moved him to lay down his life for them. We have received his love through faith and reflect that love by obedience to Christ's commands. Contrary to what the unbelieving world thinks – happiness is knowing and serving a loving Savior.

Adding to our joy is the fact that we are friends of the risen Savior. He has chosen us purely out of grace – revealing to us the words of his Father. He has given us a purpose in life. He has assured us that his heavenly Father will hear and answer our prayers. That's why we can say: Happiness is remaining in Jesus love and experiencing Jesus' friendship. That's a happiness which will last longer than a life time. It will last an eternity. Amen.