

## John 15:9-17

## Deep Gladness

*"I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."*

In the name of the One Risen and Living God.+ *Amen.*

Joy. Can you imagine – our Lord teaching about joy, and about love, just a day away from Gethsemane, and Golgotha? *"So that your joy may be complete."* So hard for me to imagine. I think of "joy" as such a scarce and elusive thing. And "complete joy" – well, maybe that's just something to look forward to. Life on earth is not for sissies, I say, and joy is kind of on the farther side of things for many of us, especially these days. But of all the images that today's Gospel evokes, joy is what stands out today.

But how do we approach the concept of joy? How am I to preach about that, given the unceasing struggle and suffering in the world? Couldn't the Gospel text for this Sunday be about coping, or worry, or the weight of the unknown - or maybe just the fine art of putting one foot in front of another? Now *that* I could preach about. But joy – much less "complete joy" – that's a challenge.

First, having a great respect for the power of words, I have to wonder about the word "joy," with all the associations we have with that word. I think of joy as those rare transitory experiences of radiant happiness – "mountain-top experiences." Glimpses of the almost unbearable beauty of things, which are otherwise clouded over by familiarity, and the concerns of daily life. I think of joy as a kind of "special occasion" gift, not an everyday affair. But Jesus is telling us that he wants our joy to be *complete*: *πληροο*/playro-o: literally, filled to the brim, for keeps.

If this is what he wanted for me – filled to the brim with complete joy - then I have fallen far short, and, as Ricky said to Lucy, "I've got some splainin' to do." I regularly lose perspective, and get fooled by temporary trials; I fall into sadness, and forget that I trust my God. We all do; it's part of being human, and part of being a Christian. It's why we gather together regularly, at least every Sunday - to regain perspective, to step out of isolation and into community, to re-member our Lord in the Eucharist, and to deepen our understanding of him, the Word made flesh.

So let's think deeply about this joy that our Lord wants for us. In New Testament Greek, the word *κἠρᾶ*/khara which is translated today as "joy" actually means "gladness." What a relief! Maybe there's hope for me yet: Gladness is something I think we can all grasp, maybe easier than joy. I can find gladness if I look for it. And especially if this is something that our Lord wants for us, then I can surely give a renewed effort to finding the glad things in my day.

I started writing this sermon sitting outside on the church grounds the other day with my dog Luna. Soaking up the blessed sun, watching the world's biggest bumblebees learning to fly, I was captivated by her ability to be totally present to the moment. All senses engaged, drinking in the day, untroubled by worries or pain, she just enjoyed. Doggie smile and all. Completely glad. And it dawned on me that I could learn a lot from her about gladness. I

could get myself out into God's creation a little more often, where my perspective always shifts and my spirits always lift, and engage all my senses, just as Luna does. Studying the daily progress of a flower in bloom, or feeling the softness of new green leaves, I am reminded of the simple joys, and the deep gladness, that are ours whenever we take time to admire God's handiwork. Might there be some deep fracture in modern life that has removed us from nature, and deepened our brokenness? It's worth wondering about. Whatever the myriad of reasons, we do suffer in our split-screen, overextended, always-late-for-something world, and a sure antidote to the toxicity of multitasking is to just step outside: smell the green grass, sense the quiet life among the flowers, hear the miracle of birdsong. See if you might feel yourself filling-up with a deep gladness. And remember that this is what Jesus wants for us. This deep gladness is not meant to be a once-in-a-while special treat, or a once-in-a-lifetime mountain top experience: Jesus wants us to wake up, to be present to God in all things at all times, and be filled.

*"I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."*

Jesus knew when he said this that he had only one or two days left on the earth. He was filled with love for his disciples, with his appreciation for the beauty of the earth, and the temporal fragility of it all. He was totally present, taking it all in. We, too, may only have this day, or the next, to live – only God knows the length of our lives. Let's learn from our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of Creation, and from lovely Luna-dog, the mystery mutt, to be present even in the midst of worry and brokenness to the blessings around us, and be filled to the brim with deep gladness for the gift of life on earth, with the God of love.

Amen.

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