

May 17, 2009  
The Sixth Sunday After Easter  
John 15:9-17  
Abiding in Love

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

As we sang in our opening hymn, Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice! Joy is in our very being as Christians! Joy, a fruit of the Spirit of God. But how often is joy misunderstood? When we speak of joy our thoughts often find themselves going towards happiness. Joy is not the opposite of sad. Even having joy doesn't mean there won't be times when you won't smile or won't have any troubles. JOY is that confident faith. The joy of the Gospel! It is knowing what God has done, that the ransom has been paid for. That God made you His child. That He engraved you on the palms of His hands. By grace through faith, that great joy is created by Christ's death and resurrection in you.

And that joy is created. For it is a gift. This joy is a gift of God. You can't tell someone to be joyful. Usually, it makes things much worse. For then we feel horrible when we are not filled with joy. Remember our Lord's words, **These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, that your joy may be full.** Whose joy is it? It's God's! Given to us through His words. That word tells us that we are His. Nothing can change that fact.

We have our shares of troubles, though. These troubles try and take our eyes off of our Lord, and so rob us of not only our joy but also our faith off of Christ. But where does our joy come from? Again, it is not from not having struggles and troubles, or by relying on our own abilities, but it is that we may take our eyes off Jesus, He never turns his eyes from us. Christ, will never take His eyes off of you. Rejoice, then Christians!

Yet, what is holding you bound and captive? What is trying to make your life a living hell? That no matter how hard you try, you can't get ourselves out of? What sin, what trouble, what temptation, what issue? We are firmly possessed by sin. It's not true for just a few but it is true for everyone.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. That means that sin just isn't floating around in the world, and that others sin, but that sin is here, in me. And that doesn't mean I'm just confessing a couple of sins, the ones that happen here and there, some of the bad mixed with the good that I did this week. It means that when I stand before the Lord and try and explain any good done on my own, and think that on my own I'm good enough, I lie. On my own, my very best is not good enough. We are captives to sin. Sin wreaks havoc in our lives. There is nothing to salvage.

But God has seen the state we are in. He has come to us and He rescued us from our own sins and the sins of the world! He didn't do the easy thing. God did not cut and run. He could have let us have our sins. He loves even the unlovable. He didn't just talk about it, though and write of it, but He did it. We live because He lived and died and lives again. That the chains of sin, death, and hell would not bind us. He turned it all on its head. He chained up sin, death, hell, and Satan by dying and rising.

Jesus, He who will save His people from their sins, did just that. He jumped into our world and lived amongst the sinful filth of this world. He came and took our sins, our shortcomings, our failures, our shouldas and couldas, our pride, and hate. He took them on Himself and gave us His righteousness. So Christ condemned, we are set free.

The Cross has set us free! Free from our sin, our bondage, our guilt, our, well, whatever in this world and life that seeks to rob us of our life and joy. We have forgiveness. We have been released from our sins, not that we won't sin again, because we will, and that we won't have any problems, for we will have them too. But in Christ you know that these things, these sins and problems cannot win. For they have already been

destroyed by Him. Jesus has rescued, forgiven, and raised you to a new life in the resurrection! You belong to Him, not to them, not to your sins.

And so in Christ we see a great reversal. The captives are set free, and the captor is captive. We are safe. We are blessed. We are filled with joy!

But know this: Satan will try. Health problems, family struggles, financial problems, work problems, school problems, relationship problems, church problems, marriage problems, disasters, crime, politics, anger, hatred, pride, lust, loneliness; even ease, money, pleasure, and luxury. All of those things and others He uses to take our eyes off of Jesus. He uses them to convince us we don't need Him, or to get us to doubt His love and care. To think that you have already made it as a perfect person or to convince you that the Lord is punishing you for some sin. Satan is trying to get us to believe that our Saviors love for us is a sham.

But we hear something different from our Lord. He has striven for us. He suffered for our good. That He would shed His precious blood. His work did not end on the cross, but also at His resurrection. Nor at His ascension. He is still praying for you. He is still wrestling for you – He gives you His Word and Spirit in Baptism! He strengthens the New Man with His body and His blood! And so what was accomplished on the cross is given to us in His Word and in His gifts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper! He abides in us and we in Him. His joy is given to us.

**Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. No longer do I call you slaves...but I have called you friends.** Satan wants you to believe that you are a slave. But you are the Lord's friend. You don't have to earn your salvation. He gives you salvation, life, and forgiveness. You don't earn it as a slave would. He has made you His friend. It's not up to you, but it is up to Him. Abiding in His Word, in Baptism, in Absolution, in the Sacrament of the Altar you will bear fruit. Not in your own strength but because He lives in you and you through Him. So rejoice!

And on Thursday we rejoice! As we remember the day that our Lord ascended into heaven. And the disciples returned, not mourning and moping, but rejoicing! Usually when someone leaves we are sad and distraught, but here Jesus leaves and the disciples rejoice. Remember the truth: **These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.** Jesus ascends into heaven not to abandon us but to send the Holy Spirit. To comfort, to guide, to enlighten, and to strengthen.

And so we do rejoice this Easter season and at all times. During times of change, in suffering, troubles, difficulties, pains, and confusion. Even in death. We may not be happy, for there will be times of pain and sorrow, but underneath, we have a strong and joyful hope and confidence, knowing that the victory is ours. The outcome is determined! For He said so. So we live in joy and peace, and die in joy and peace.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.