

KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH



John 15:9-17
A Joy-Filled Life

An old friend and college roommate of mine has a daughter going to school in Riverside. A few weeks ago he was out to visit her so we drove out to Riverside on a Sunday afternoon to see him. The nice thing about seeing an old friend is that while we may have plenty to catch up on because we haven't seen each other in a long time, we were immediately comfortable with each other. There were no introductions necessary. Our hair is grayer than years ago and we aren't in nearly as good of shape as we were when we were roommates. But in spite of the changes in our lives, we are still friends who enjoy each other's company.

Jesus packed quite a bit of comfort into the verses from our Gospel Lesson. One of the things I want you to let soak into your heart is that he calls you a friend. We are not servants who are beneath him and don't know what he's doing. While that doesn't mean we are his equals, it means that our relationship with him is comfortable and familiar.

That comfortable relationship with Jesus is amazing because it is not what we deserve. Jesus says he few things in our text that might cause us to cringe with guilt. **"If you obey my command you will remain in my love."** Or he says, **"Love each other as I have loved you."** But we haven't always obeyed his commands. What about those times we told lies? Or what about the on-going (at times, unnoticed) attitude of indifference toward God's Word as we skip worship for trivial things or are afraid to go to Bible Class for reasons that only the devil would like or we don't read our Bibles at home because we just forget (which isn't a very good excuse if reading the Bible is important). Add in all our other immoral, selfish, loveless actions and we cannot claim to obey God's commands.

I'm as good as anybody at minimizing sin. But the reality is that sin cannot be made small. It is not funny that we fail to obey God. It may be

normal, but that doesn't mean it is acceptable. Ask a teacher whose entire class failed a test if that is acceptable. It may have been the norm, but it won't be accepted. Our sins make us enemies of God. He would be perfectly fair if he had planned to send every human — including you — into the fiery abyss of hell to suffer and burn forever..

"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends." The love of God for us is, quite frankly, ridiculous. We should be enemies of God because of our sins, but we get promoted right past servant to friends!

Jesus alludes to the reason in our text: **"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."** The truth that Jesus states in a general way is seen in Jesus' death for us. So great was his love for us, that he died in our place. His death was the punishment that we had earned from God. On the cross, every bit of God's anger at our sins was appeased as the sin was punished. Now we are free from sin's curse. Through faith in Jesus, God sees you as perfect.

With our sins removed, we are now God's friends. Living in this troubled world, let that sink into your soul! You have a very powerful friend. He's comfortable with you because in his eyes you are perfect.

Servants do their work because they have to. You may not have full-time servants in your house, but you hire servants to do short-term jobs for you. They clean your carpet or fix your drain or clean your house. But they don't stop by just to see how you are doing. And they don't do work for you for free. A friend, on the other hand, helps because you need the help. A friend doesn't expect payment; he might even be insulted at the thought of you paying for his help.

Because of Jesus' great love that led him to lay down his life for us and because he calls us his friends, we are people who are eager to obey his commands. We will not achieve perfection, but that doesn't mean our hearts are not changed. We do obey, because Jesus chose us and appointed us to bear fruit from him. In the verses right before our Gospel Lesson (from last week's reading) Jesus tells us that he is the vine, we are the branches. Connected to him by faith, we will bear fruit.

This is why Jesus says, **"Your joy may be complete."** Joy is not based on the circumstances of our lives. Bank accounts and big houses and promotions do not determine the Christian's joy. Health and success are not part of the equation. Our joy is set because we are friends of Jesus!

Our status as children of God gives us joy. We are loved. We are forgiven. We are fully prepared to live in heaven.

We also find joy in the circumstances of our lives. Work and service and study and recreation are gifts from God. Using our time and our skills to do good for others brings us joy. Even the trials we face are reason for us to have joy. Each

setback or failure is a reminder of our need for Jesus — a friend who will never leave us! As we go back to him for help and forgiveness we always find his arms are open. And so the life of a Christian has the on-going joy of knowing Jesus is with us.

Too often people look for fulfillment and joy in places it will not be found. Too often we are tempted to escape the hardships of this life with distractions that change nothing.

Joy comes from bearing the fruit God desires. He made us; he knows what works best. In our Second Lesson we read, **"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God"** (1 John 4:7).

Think of the friendship you have with Jesus. In spite of your weaknesses, he is comfortable calling you a friend. He wants to be part of your life. That kind of a Savior-God is motivation to willingly obey his commands. In those commands we will find joy in this life. Amen.

6th Sunday of Easter
May 10, 2015

