

Abiding Joy
John 15:1 – 11; Galatians 5:16 – 25
Sunday, July 7, 2019

When we moved into our home, one of the first things we did was to put a swing on the front porch. We'll sit out there in the afternoon and swing with the kids. And when the kids go to bed, I will go out and sit on that swing for *hours* while the sun goes down and the fireflies come out. I'll read or listen to music or just do nothing but swing and take in the sights and sounds of the neighborhood. It has become my favorite place in the entire world. It fills my heart and makes me happy. It gives me *joy* just to sit out there on that swing.

What gives *you* joy in life? (At this point the congregation shared what gives them joy.)

Family, friends, food (cooking or eating food), being outdoors, playing sports, watching sports. There are *so many things* that give us joy. So what happens when we *lose* those things? Because all of those things can be taken away from us. We can lose our families; our kids, grandkids, spouses, parents, grandparents, siblings. Pretty much *all* of us have lost someone we love. Relationships can come to an end through death, divorce, a break up, a falling out. We can lose the *people* in our lives who give us joy.

Singing, music; we can lose your ability to sing or even to hear. Music can be taken away from us.

Food can be taken away from us. There are plenty of people in the world, in our community, who do not have enough food. I know plenty of people who have lose the ability to cook that used to give them joy.

Being outdoors, working outdoors, working in the yard; there are times when we have to give *that* up. Playing sports, exercising, running; there comes a time when we lose the physical ability to do *that*. Even if our *jobs* give us joy, there comes a time when that has to end.

One day, even if it's 50 years from now, I'm not going to be able to swing on that porch swing anymore.

All of these things can be taken away from us. What do we do *then*; when we lose the *people* or the *things* that give us joy?

I think the problem is that in our culture, we have confused *joy* with *pleasure*. And there is a *difference* between the two.

Pleasure is *external*. It is brought about by something *outside* of you; something *other* than you. Pleasure depends on your *circumstances*, your *surroundings*, your *activities*. Most of the time, pleasure is brought about by something physical. It's about how *someone* or *something* makes you *feel*; it comes from what you are *doing*, and it is *temporary*, because, eventually, what you are *doing* has to *end*.

Joy is *internal*. It results from a *fullness*, an *abundance* inside of you. Joy does *not* depend on your circumstances, surroundings, or activities. It can exist *apart* from those things. You can be struggling, emotionally or physically, and *still* have joy. While pleasure comes from what you are *doing*, joy arises from being fully satisfied with *who you are* no matter what you are doing or what is happening. You can *still* have joy when all those other things are taken away from you. *Pleasure is temporary, but joy is lasting.*

Pleasure is not a *bad* thing. God has provided us with things in this world that are pleasurable: intimate relationships, beautiful music, delicious food. God created (or gave *us* the ability to create) these pleasurable things, and they are *good*. We just have to make sure that our sense of self is not *dependent* on them; that our *joy* is in the *giver* and not the *gift*. We must strive to find a fulfillment that is not dependent on our circumstances or surroundings.

C.S. Lewis once said, “I sometimes wonder whether all pleasures are not substitutes for joy.”

There’s a verse in Proverbs that says, “Whoever loves pleasure will suffer want.” But Jesus says in John’s gospel, “No one will take your joy from you.”

How do we get *that* kind of joy in our lives?

Paul talks about joy as a fruit of the Spirit; as an outgrowth of the work of the Holy Spirit in you. And Jesus says in this reading that he is the true vine and God is the vinegrower, and that apart from him we can bear no fruit. “Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit,” he says. So to bear this kind of fruit and have this kind of joy in our lives, we must *abide in Christ*. What does that *mean*? What does it *look like* to “abide in Christ?”

We talked last week about how Paul starts off this whole list of the fruit of the Spirit with love because, Paul says, if you don’t have *love*, you won’t be able to have joy and peace and patience and kindness and all these other things. It all starts with love. And Jesus says here that “as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.”

So “abiding in Christ” starts with abiding in his *love*. And to *abide* means “to remain in,” “to not depart from.” So to abide in Christ’s love means that we *do not depart* from it; we *remain* in it always. Jesus says, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.” Well, what are his commandments? We’re not talking about the *Ten Commandments* here or the 600+ commandments of Jewish law. Jesus has just said to his disciples at the end of chapter 13, “I give you a *new* commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” And elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus says that all the law is summed up in this commandment, that you “love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

We abide in Christ by abiding in his love, and we abide in his love by loving *God* and loving our *neighbor*. If we do *that*, Jesus says, his joy will be in us, and our joy will be made complete.

This word that Jesus and Paul both use for *joy* is the Greek word *chara*. It comes from the same Greek word as the word for *grace*, *charis*. That word *grace* is defined in a lot of different ways – unconditional love, blessing, favor – but one of the definitions is “that which affords joy.” Grace is that which affords joy. Unconditional love affords joy. When we are loved and accepted *as* we are, for *who* we are, that brings about *joy* in us because we’re not trying to meet some *standard* in order to be *worthy* of love. When we love and accept others as *they* are, for who *they* are, that brings about *joy* (in both *them* and *us*, because we aren’t spending our time and energy trying to make them meet some standard to be worthy of our love).

What we see here is that *joy* and *grace* come from the same place. They come from *God*. One author says, “Joy refers to a delight in God and God’s salvation for the sheer beauty and worth of

who God is. The Holy Spirit's joy is not dependent on external circumstances but is deep-seeded and is rooted in the heart filled with love for our Lord.”

Joy is a fullness that exists inside of you that no one else can touch because it is the result of love between you and God, which Jesus calls us to share with our neighbor. If you are filled with an awareness of the love that God has for you and you are striving to share that love with your neighbor, then it doesn't matter what is happening in your life, you can *still* have joy. You could lose your job or your house might burn down, and you can still say, “That's *stuff*. My joy does not *depend* on that. My joy is the result of God's love for me, and *nothing* can touch it.”

In just a moment, we are going to come to this table and be reminded of the love that God has for us. That God loves us so much God became one of us in Jesus Christ and gave his life for us; his body broken and blood shed that we might be made whole. There is nothing you have to do to *earn* that love, and there is nothing you can do to *lose* it; it is a gift, given out of the goodness of God.

God wants you to have *joy* in this life. We just have to be careful not to confuse the things that make us *happy* or that make us *feel good* for a deep, abiding, lasting *joy*. Joy is a fullness that exists inside of you when you are able to fully and unconditionally love because you know that you are fully and unconditionally loved by God. And when you have that fullness, even in the hard times, no one can take that away from you.