

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Sixth Sunday of Easter - Year B

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Acts 10:44-48

Psalm 98

1 John 5:1-6

John 15:9-17

05/06/2018

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

[Jesus said:] 9“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. 11I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

12“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

The Gospel of our Lord

Prayer

Let us pray,

Amen

Make Joy Complete

Good morning! I start today's sermon with a personal story. I was diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder during my second year of seminary. I was started on a lower dose of an anti-depressant and when I met back up with my psychiatrist to talk about how I was feeling and how the medication was going, I discovered something that I didn't expect. The medication seemed to be working, but I would get these horrible bouts of depression where I felt like absolute crap. The side-effect really worried me, but it turned out that what was actually going on was much more interesting. I had always thought I was what we call "OCD", but what surprised me was the source of the problem. Apparently it all stemmed from a mess of anxiety and depression that was the true root cause. During college I had a few panic attacks (strangely they all started after I proposed to Megan) so the anxiety was understandable, but depression? Me? So what I had thought were the side-effects of the medication was really just the way I had felt BEFORE I started taking the pills. It didn't seem possible, I was really that bad? That was how I felt?!

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Abiding in love... making joy complete. That's where Jesus Christ calls us. We have, right in front of us, this offer of joy, not just temporary happiness, but joy! In order to get there we need to let go of what ends up stopping us from believing and seeing that joy. I maintain that the problem that truly holds us all back is a problem with the self. For some it's depression, forcing us to feel so defeated that loving others and receiving joy can feel impossible. It's that part of us that longs for this type of joy. And while the problems and solutions for mental illness are far too complicated for one sermon, there is one thing that I think holds the rest of us back from making Christ's joy complete, something that we can talk about and address. For the bulk of us, the problem is too much concern for ourselves.

Take for example the scenario I've seen played out time and time again. Maybe it's a changed flight at the airport, or a slow person ahead of you at the checkout, regardless of the time or place it always goes the same. The line of people becomes more and more angry at the person or thing at the front of the line that seems to be causing the problem, and the anger starts to fester! It grows and grows with each and every perceived slight until anger is the only thing that one sees.

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The only thing stopping us from abiding in love, from making joy complete is ourselves. If we could let go of that anger, if we could realize that we're all just human beings, it could set us free. A common theme in my sermons over the last few months has been that love is a decision, and WE have to decide to love. We need to decide to let go of our anger, and I'm talking about more situations than just airports and checkouts. When we break free from our blindness a whole new world of possibility is before us!

We often look around the world and feel defeated, we believe that it's all just too much, that nothing we do could change the pain we see. But my dear Lutherans, that's Satan at work in you, to channel the language of Martin Luther. While God is the only one who can truly enact powerful change in the world, God ALREADY HAS! In the person of Jesus Christ we are saved and redeemed! Set free from sin, set free to make the decision to love! Here in the Gospel of John we're shown what it takes to carry on in Jesus Christ's discipleship. We need to love one another, we need to make the hard decision to ignore the little voice in the back of our heads that tells us it's impossible, that tries to convince us that the effort of one little person is just too small compared to the whole world of sin. Ignore it! Decide love instead! Listen once again to the words of the savior of the entire universe:

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When we share the peace in a few minutes, remember that, take these words seriously. We have been appointed, YOU have been appointed, we have been chosen to show love for one another. Let us hold fast to that promise. Amen.