

**SERMON “JOY”
SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR B
BASED ON JOHN 15:11**

Our joy is in Jesus. Once more, say it with me, our joy is in Jesus.

Now, because our joy is in another, in Jesus, our joy does not depend on us. This is good news for us because our joy does not depend on us, our mood, the company we keep, the pressures we feel in daily living, our accomplishments or lack of accomplishments, even the anxiety we experience because of our spiritual weakness or timidity. Our joy is in Jesus.

There are many opportunities for us to feel anxiety as we think about being in the presence of our holy and righteous God. This anxiety, however, so easily cheats us of the joy we have in Christ.

That is why I greet you each Sunday morning with that quotation from the prophet Nehemiah, which is now engraved on our beautiful stained-glass door: “The joy of the Lord is our strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10) I believe this message needs to be repeated each time we gather for worship, over and over, Sunday after Sunday.

The joy of the Lord is our strength. Our joy is in Jesus. Our joy is in another. Our joy is not in ourselves.

From today’s Gospel text, Jesus says, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:11)
Our joy is in Him, not in ourselves. And, because it is in Him, it is full, complete and perfect.

So just what is the joy of Jesus? His joy is to seek and save the lost. His joy is His mission to save the world. His joy is to proclaim the arrival of the kingdom of God. His joy is even to endure the cross for sinners like us. (Hebrews 12:2)

Our joy is in Jesus. We, therefore, are to be joyful people. But a warning. Please know, the world hates joyful people, especially joyful Christians, because our joy is not found in the things of this world. The sacrilege of the world is to love itself rather than find joy as followers of Jesus. This is why the world hates those who find joy in Jesus. The world is lost and always has been lost.

We know who we are, while those who love the world are still trying to create some identity out of thin air. We know who we are because we have fellowship with God who names us at the baptismal font as a child of God. Meanwhile, the world has no idea of its identity...

When I was a teenager, my daddy would always say to me just before I went off to do something stupid with my friends, he would say: “Do not forget who you belong to.”

He did not mean my mother or him. He meant my Heavenly Father. When we know who our God is, then we know who we are.

The family fellowship with have with God is amazing, to think that God seeks fellowship with sinners like us. Don't forget who you belong to.

Monday morning this week, I was at the Knoxville airport, my daughter was flying back home to New York City. I always stand there in the terminal, misty-eyed hoping for one last glance. She waves to me as she makes it through the TSA line and x-ray machine or sometimes the TSA tango, the ol' pat down.

As I watched her go and wave, I began talking with a gentleman who was standing next to me, doing the same thing, also watching someone go through the line and disappear on the other side of the x-ray line.

We started talking about our jobs. He is from Egypt and doing some government exchange program with the Lab in Oak Ridge. I told him I was a pastor. I usually say I'm in insurance whenever a stranger asks what I do. It gets complicated when you say you're a pastor, so I say I am in insurance, you know I am if you think about it...

But for this dignified gentleman, I couldn't pull his leg, so I told him I'm a pastor. He told me he was a Suni Muslim. He asked, "Do you pray?" I said yes, if there's one thing I'm good at and one thing I do a lot, it is pray. I'm a praying dude.

He asked, "Who hears? Who listens to your prayers?"

Pretty good question from a stranger there at the waterfall and carved bears at Tyson McGee airport, don't you think? "Who answers your prayers?"

I said, "God. God listens." And I tried to explain how Jesus is our way to God. Christianity is not a path, not like a flight path that the pilots will be using on these flights which chart their path to their destinations.

I tried to explain to him, "Christianity's way is not a path but a person. Jesus Himself. Christianity is not so much a path; it is not even a way of living. Instead, it is a life that is Christ's own life. He is our life, and we are hidden in him, wrapped up in Him. We are wrapped up in the flesh of God, in Jesus."

The Kurdish gentleman heard me. With wide eyes, eyes of wonder, he asked, "Is this really your God? A joy-bestowing God?"

I said, "Yes, exactly. You got it. Our joy, our happiness, our life is in Him and Him alone. The joy of the Lord is our strength, our anchor, our beginning."

We talked a while longer. I walked out with him and ran to my vehicle to find a prayer book and my business card to give to him. We said our goodbyes, and both admitted that our conversation was going to cost us a few extra dollars at the parking lot exit booth, but paying for the extra hour or so was worth it to make a new friend.

I like his insight in his question: “Is your God really a joy-bestowing God?” He had the answer in his question, didn’t he? God is a joy-bestowing God.

What is joy? First, I’d like to state that joy is a good feeling. It is not an idea, not a conviction, not even a decision. It is an emotion, a feeling. You don’t have immediate control over your emotions and feelings. You can’t just snap your finger and decide to feel something. Joy is a good feeling.

Second, joy is a good feeling in the soul. The soul imparts virtue, knows right from wrong. More than something I sense in my body or think in my head, I feel joy in my soul.

And third, joy is a good feeling in the soul produced by the Holy Spirit. If it comes from my soul, I cannot force it or make it happen. It comes as a gift of God, and it is a fruit of the Spirit. Therefore, the joy in my soul overflowing for my love of God is produced by the Holy Spirit, it comes from the Spirit.

The fourth and final piece is that the Holy Spirit does this work not magically, without my mind being engaged, but by causing me to see the glory and beauty of Christ. When I realize all that Christ is doing, when I see Him in all things, when I understand all that He is, then my heart is drawn out towards Him in joy. My joy is only complete through Him. The Holy Spirit bears this fruit by causing me to see the beauty of Christ.

So, to review: Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul produced by the Holy Spirit causing us to see the glory, the beauty of Christ.

Jesus reminds us in today’s Gospel text: “I have told you all things, shared the very secrets of the universe with you, so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

My goodness, how can we be anything but joyful?

Oh, the joy of the Lord is our strength. Amen,