



“God’s All About Joy”

Pastor Andy CastroLang

May 13, 2018

Scripture (CEB):

John 15:9-17

⁹“As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love.

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.

¹¹ **I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete.**

¹² **This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you.**¹³ **No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends.**¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I don’t call you servants any longer, because servants don’t know what their master is doing.

Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You didn’t choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last. As a result, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.

¹⁷ I give you these commandments so that you can love each other.

Sermon:

Sometimes, pastors get a break from trying so so hard to say the very right thing, in the very best way. Because somebody else already said it. And said it really well, too.

There is a ministry that comes from our national UCC offices, a daily prayer email that

any of us can subscribe to. It is called the daily devotional and I recommend it to all of you. Sometimes they are funny, sometimes they teach you something new, sometimes they comfort or uplift you. It really depends on the writer.

One of my personal favorites is the Rev. Mary Luti, a minister, professor and a bit of a mystic, I think. Last Sunday she wrote about this very text that you just heard, and I feel compelled to share her words with you now:

For Joy

Mary Luti
May 6, 2018

"I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." - John 15:11

So it was all about joy.

It was for joy he was born, for joy he befriended and healed, for joy he offended the powers, for joy he said love one another and love the world even though you don't belong to it and it's never going to love you back. It was for joy he endured the terrible shame, for joy he was raised, for joy he said peace be with you and pardoned us everything, for joy he went to sit at God's right hand, for joy upon joy he will return, the first mercy and the last. It was so that his joy would be in us, and our joy would be complete.

And all this time you thought it was about duty, so you've been doing it. You thought it was about making an effort, so you've been making one. You thought it was about becoming a better person and making the world a better place, so you've slogged away. You thought it was about you, about what God wants you to do, about the difference you should be making, about getting the holy job done.

But it was always about joy. The joy of his company. The joy of his grace. The joy of his love for God. The joy of his justice. Even the hard joy of his suffering. It was about being branches of his vine, sheep of his flock, drinking from the living waters of his deep, deep well. It was about doing just and

saving work with him, in him, and through him, not for him, like some boss, not to merit a star, and not until you drop.

No, it was for the joy we know when we know him. It was always about joy. It still is.

(Prayer - Jesus, joy of our desiring, joy no circumstance can alter, be our joy forever. Amen.)

What does this change in you, if this is true?

Do you feel confused about joy? It is not the same as Happiness.

Another beloved and famous author I have known, Madeleine L'Engle says that the difference between happiness and joy is the knowledge of sorrow. Joy knows sorrow and understands it. Joy flows over sorrow and beyond it. Happiness hopes to never be touched by sorrow. But joy is greater after sorrow, and even in the midst of sorrow, you can understand that joy will come.

Joy endures.

What do you know of joy? When have you felt washed in joy? Can you share with the body of Christ gathered here in this moment, an experience of joy? Please, do so...

Can it change the circumstances of your devotion to Jesus, to God, to Holy Spirit?

Can it change the face of your service, if indeed as Mary writes, you are doing it for joy, not duty? That it was all about you...slogging away, working hard at justice or baking, or any other church or ministry thing...because it was your duty.

But maybe it's not duty...it's joy. The joy of seeing and experiencing people uplifted and the world changed by the work of justice. The joy of teaching children because they are so wonderful and open, joyful and fun!

Perhaps it is all about joy: joy in the meetings, joy in the jobs. Joy in the work I do here 5-6 days a week, as part of the community of love and joy that you are. Maybe if I let it, maybe if you let it...we will feel joy in building this church up and welcoming friends and strangers into it, maybe we might just feel joy in ministry to this city, perhaps there will

be a deep well of joy that guides us in all we do together.

Love and joy.

This text is full of these two uplifting, encouraging, strengthening, enlightening possibilities. Suggesting that the very nature of our Creator God is JOY, is LOVE.

It's not about duty. It's certainly not about fear. It's not about guilt. Definitely not shame, or the desperate hunger to still the voice of inadequacy that eats away at some of us inside. None of that.

Love knits together, brings together into shared life, into community. Love is deep and willing to sacrifice for another. Love strengthens others, it is the very fabric of life. I have known, both in my heart and in my mind, that it is LOVE that set the galaxies to spinning, and gave me life, and gave you life. But JOY? How fabulous! A laughing, grinning Creator having such abundance of joy that it pours out in all of creation!

And that joy can fill us full, full of hope. Strong, and enduring hope, strong and enduring joy. Tough enough to face disappointment, face despair, face wickedness and face cruelty.

And endure.

Trusting in joy. As Mary Luti writes; it is for the joy of knowing Jesus, and in knowing Jesus, knowing God. With Jesus, in and through him, knowing the deep deep well of God's creative, justice shining, peace bringing joy.