

Sixth Sunday of Easter

“Resurrection leads to joyful connections/touching”

John 15:9-17

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Analysis by James Squire

9As 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.

NOTES: Joy, like most emotions, is not turned inward, but it is both about and targeted at someone else. Like all emotions, of course, it impacts the one who has it, but it nevertheless celebrates another. So what does it mean when Jesus says, “so that my joy may be in you”?

Furthermore, touch is vital to the experience of joy. Perhaps it

is no coincidence that Jesus washed their feet in John's gospel. Perhaps it is no coincidence that in John's gospel, the disciples "remembered... and believed" over and over again.

Of course, joy must have been the furthest thing from the disciples' minds. "Joy????? What's this talk of joy?" Indeed, when anyone, even Jesus, has to tell people "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you," it is painfully clear that his hearers are fairly joyless at the time; otherwise there would be no need for Jesus to emphasize it. And what do the disciples have to feel joyful about anyway? Their savior is about to leave them.

DIAGNOSIS: The touch of death

Step 1-Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : Questionable joy

This Jesus is a piece of work. He turns our world upside down with his signs, so that we cannot ignore him, and he uses that inroad to attack our reasons for being attracted to him. John's first 12 chapters are filled with marvelous signs and gut-wrenching discourse in which Jesus never budes an inch. And now, in today's text, he summarizes all this history as "love" that we can abide in (v. 9). His message to us is supposed to put his everlasting joy in us (v. 11). There's no question that Jesus touched the lives of his disciples very deeply, but was it a joyful touch? He says it was, but how was it to them? Indeed, his disciples have the appearance of loved ones who are not getting loved. He spends a great deal of time in the Upper Room reassuring them that everything that has happened and that will happen will be good news for them, including the fact that he is returning to the Father. Yet, all his reassurances are met with questions born of doubt. They are getting more nervous as time goes on. All they see is their world falling apart. The more

Jesus talks, the more the lights seem to be going out. They are feeling the darkness.

Step 2-Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Unacceptable path leads to death*

In fact, Jesus' touch exposes their unfaith. They don't trust him. This "love" of his is beyond their comfort zone. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (v. 13). This is not the life for us. See, that's the problem with Jesus: his talk is dangerous. Laying down your life? Keep up that sort of talk and that's exactly what he'll be doing. It becomes clear to us that the path Jesus wants us to follow is one that leads to death. It matters little that it is his death which seems so imminent. This is still too much to ask of us. If this is joy, we'd be better off with whatever passes for sorrow. We'll take our darkness over this light anytime. It sure seems to us like he's got that backwards, doesn't he?

Step 3-Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Unconnected, left for dead anyway*

But that leaves us with self-joy, and that is no joy at all. Whatever we think of what Jesus offers us with his joy, to turn it down leaves us high and dry, for there is no one for us to truly enjoy if not for Jesus. He represents the source of all true joy. We settle for false, reflexive joy and it leaves us cold. We have no connection with the Father, the author of all life. We are dead, or might as well be.

PROGNOSIS: The touch of Life

Step 4-Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Reconnected to Jesus through death*

True joy never stops seeking targets. It is nothing if it is not received. True joy from Jesus is relentless. His joy is not joy at all unless it is in us (v. 11). Joy is his only weapon, if you will. Until it finds its target, he will not rest. John's

gospel truly is a gospel of love. For all his argumentativeness, Jesus is the one who is ultimately vulnerable. He takes out after everyone – even his followers – like in no other gospel, but always as if he is the defendant, which in fact he is. Even in our text, he is defending himself against the questions that were written all over their faces, except he's not defending himself, but his gospel. What is more, he dies for this love, and that seems to be the plan. The disciples may well have had that impression, listening to him. His mission is to expose our darkness until we fight back, then suffer the consequences while steadfastly defending his gospel. This mission cannot help but kill him. Therein lies the genius of the gospel: all our attempts to rid our lives of him leave us involved forever in his death, and more importantly, involved forever in his resurrection. We cannot rid our lives of him, no matter how hard we try. Joy wins out.

Step 5-Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Shepherded through death into Life*

Jesus' touch will be different when he does in fact rise from the dead. Peter will still cringe (chapter 21), but he will be reborn. Indeed, as soon as Jesus emerges from death, we cling to him, just like Mary did (20:17). Having been drawn to his cross against our "better judgment", we find ourselves breathless at his empty tomb – joyfully so. We find ourselves in Jesus' hands, much like the beloved disciple and Jesus' mother did at the foot of the cross (19:26-27). His touch has brought us through death into new life. It was Jesus' resurrection that turned his followers into true believers, opening up complete understanding for them of all the signs Jesus had performed while with them. Likewise when we experience Jesus' resurrection, it makes firm believers out of us, as well. His joy has been put into our hearts, and now it is his followers who touch him, handling his body to examine his death marks and breaking his body when we

distribute Holy Communion.

Step 6-Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *True joy discovered, shared*

Our world is being turned upside down, but the resurrection changes that from a bad thing to a good thing. Gone is the need for us to somehow impress Jesus and be impressed by him in return. Christ died for all, and then punched a hole in that death, rendering it harmless to all who believe in him. We don't mind this light shining on the darkness of our world. In fact, we welcome him, even when the darkness being targeted is our own. The death that loomed large in our minds we now recognize as a doorway to eternal life.

And we are given a commandment to love one another as Christ loved us (v. 12). But that commandment does not come "from on high", like a lightning bolt from Mt. Olympus. Rather, it comes through Jesus' loving sacrifice for us. It comes as a gift: He first loved us, and then he calls us to share that love with the world around us, shining his light wherever darkness lurks. We too will find the world's hostility stirred up against us, but because his joy is in us, we are equipped to suffer that hostility joyfully, keeping our eye on the prize – the cross – even as we may be attacked for our evangelistic efforts. Such attacks have been known to backfire, with the attacker being fed a healthy dose of loving joy.