

Easter 6b 2024
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC
The Rev. Catherine L. Tatem
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Acts 10:44-48 Psalm 98 1 John 5:1-6 John 15:9-17

Today we go back to the upper room and listen to part of Jesus' farewell discourse. It takes place on the day we recognize as Maundy Thursday, in the room in which Jesus washed his disciples' feet, ate with them and gave them their instruction: do this in remembrance of me. Jesus tells the disciples how to be with him when they no longer see him, and that is to "abide in Jesus' love." Jesus says to stay with him, and he uses words that the disciples are to continue what they are already doing; that is, to persevere in, the ways in which Jesus loves us. Jesus says "As the father has loved me, so I have loved you."

Think back on what God's love looks like in Jesus' life:

When Jesus is a baby, Herod tries to kill him. After Jesus' baptism, he is sent into the wilderness and tempted by devil. One crowd is so incensed with Jesus that they try to throw him off a cliff. Jesus faces increasing conflict with religious authorities and the leaders of the Roman Empire.... His closest friends and followers deny him, abandon him and watch him die.

I don't want to be loved quite like that. I want Jesus to love us differently: kindly, preventing us from having a bad day or a bad week or a bad diagnosis or any multitude of catastrophic events. Instead, Jesus loves us in the same way that the Father loves Jesus: fully and completely in whatever the world brings. Neither the world nor even death keeps us away from God's love, and that's what Jesus keeps showing us through his life, death and resurrection. And so Jesus says, keep practicing the love that I show you. We will not go through everything that Jesus went through, thank goodness!

Still, we have not earned friendship with Jesus. We ask him how to feed 5,000 when we have no money or when we have a few handfuls of borrowed food. Jesus says, "feed them," and it happens. Peter is always messing up and we're kind of glad that he's around because otherwise we might say and do those same things. Why couldn't we stay on the mountain with Moses and Elijah? It sure beats hiding out in this room. But Jesus says to abide with *him*, and so we will. We can go through whatever we have to because Jesus has already trod this road. We live in the presence of miracles, of love that serves others. We are friends with Jesus because he shows us how – to love one another in servanthood and humble ways.

We love. This is the love of a friend who waters your plants or tells you when your outfit doesn't match. This is the friend who goes to the hospital with us, is with us when we hear "it's malignant," or "it's benign." We might celebrate life with either result. This is the friend who will make herself at home wherever we are, and we love this friend in the very same way. We will find joy in *ourselves* when we love others in the way that Jesus loves us. We try to understand why we are not guaranteed that other kind of love, the kind that says "I'll spare you this pain," even while we live in the real love of God for the Son. Only God in Jesus and the Holy Spirit loves in that truest love, with joy.

God does not grade or evaluate us on our discipleship. He gives us this (difficult) commandment so that we have a path to know a pure love that is given with joy. When you do these things ... when you keep on doing these things ... you will know joy. That joy is deeply connected to the cross. It is in John's gospel that Jesus says "it is finished," and what is finished is Jesus' work on earth. What is finished is earthly rulers and even death having any power over our lives. What is begun is our showing the world the unfathomable love that conquered our every separation from God.

It took a strong love for the Apostles to assert the Gospel message to a pagan world. It takes a strong love for that same message to thrive and grow today. It will take our determination in this election year and in a culture that does not know this abiding love to stay on our path of loving one another, of abiding in God, of living into love that says we can disagree, we can have difficult conversations, we can listen together for truth, and finally, regularly, walk with one another to this altar, this table, arms outstretched, to receive Christ. Do not deny yourselves of the living Word. Abide in Christ's love; allow that love to feed you, fill you, sustain us in God's will. In this way of love, there is joy.

Jesus knows that a new world unfolds from the events that follow the Last Supper. Jesus is preparing his friends to continue being in the midst of God's work in the world, with all its foibles, problems, and troubles, there will also be the renewal and repair of a broken world, as we become the Body of Christ, bringing his joy of service to others as a new reality for all people. Jesus embodies the Psalmist's call: "Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.... Shout with joy to the Lord, all you lands; lift up your voice, rejoice, and sing!

That is our call, too. Not to be discouraged by the world, but to bring renewal and repair to it. Joy in service is one of Redeemer's strengths; do we not also find joy in all of life? Abide in that joy and let it pour into the world.

Joy, like love, is not an emotion; I might describe it as a deep sense of God's spirit within. Priest and preacher Karoline Lewis writes the joy is not an answer [to all of life's calamities]. "It's an affirmation. It's the guarantee of God's grace when all that is good seems so far away. It's the security of God's love when it appears that love is nowhere to be felt, especially from those you thought would love you. It's the hope that even in the darkest places of separation, God's abiding and our abiding in God (1:18;13:23) is promised and present."

Jesus is not saying good bye in that upper room. He is showing us how and where to find true joy. As "alleluia" people, we know the how and the where – it's in the risen Christ, and so, as we continue in Easter we joyfully proclaim:

Alleluia! Christ is risen. *The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia.*