

**Sermon for May 10, 2015**  
**John 15:9-17**

“I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.” Really Jesus? Joy? Have you seen the world lately? We have riots, earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, terrorists, accidents and disease; and you’re talking about joy? Where in the world does joy fit into all of this? Maybe it would help if we put this reading into context.

Our reading has taken us back to the Last Supper in John between Jesus and his disciples. Judas has just left to betray him to the temple authorities. Jesus has again talked about his impending death and Peter blurts out that he will never desert Jesus even if he has to die! Jesus sadly informs Peter that he will deny even knowing him before the cock crows three times tomorrow morning. In two chapters Jesus and the disciples will leave the upper room and head for the garden of Gethsemane where Jesus will be captured and turned over to the authorities. And he keeps talking about joy.

In the next chapter, chapter 16, he tells them “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.” In chapter 17 Jesus says to them “But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.” Joy really seems to be misplaced not only in these passages about Jesus’ impending arrest and crucifixion, but also in what is going on around us in our world every day.

Joy seems to be inappropriate for the disciples when they are told that the one you have relied on for fellowship and belonging will no longer be around. Joy is an ironic response to the realities the disciples are about to face—to the realities we face every

day. Where is the joy when our children are born with disabilities, when our loved ones are taken from us by accidents or disease, when the world seems to turn to chaos more and more every day, when people we care about see so little joy in their lives that they decide to end it?

Many of you here lost a dear friend when he decided to end his life. It seems that none of us are immune to that grief. This past Sunday I received a phone call from the chairperson of the internship committee in Osseo, Wisconsin where I served as intern pastor in 2008-2009. She had called to tell me that my supervisor's only son had committed suicide the night before. Yes, he had problems, but he seemed to be working through them and getting his life together.

He had been paralyzed in an accident a few years ago and he seemed to be finally accepting what had happened and learning to live with his disabilities. He found a girlfriend who knew what the challenges were to living with someone who is paralyzed and they had moved in together and were starting to build a life with each other. He finally seemed to have real joy in his life.

I don't know what drives people to take their own lives. I don't know why our loved ones are taken from us by accidents or disease. But I do know this—our God loves us fiercely and never gives up on us. Where does our joy come from in times like these? Our joy comes from the fact that Jesus chose us. Our joy comes from the fact that Jesus calls us friends. Our joy comes from the fact that God has chosen to love us; not because of anything we have done, but because that's who God is and we can do nothing to lose that love.

While these passages seem to be out of place in today's Gospel reading; we need to hear them today for all the unjoyful things that are going on in our lives. We need to hear and believe that our sorrow will turn to joy; that our mourning will turn to celebration. How can we believe that? We can believe because Jesus promised us that in three days he would be raised from the dead—and he was! Jesus said he would and he did. We can believe because Jesus keeps his promises; he does what he says he will do.

We can believe because we have been promised a new heaven and a new earth and all of the old things will pass away. God's kingdom will be on earth as it is in heaven and the sin that separates us from the joy that comes from being with God will be no more. Our God, our friend, will be with us and God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.

"I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." Jesus said it—we can believe it. Amen.