"Request Your Joy"
Sermon for 20 December 2015
Texts: John 17: 13-23

This morning I will bring to you three attributes of Christian joy: its completeness (or, entirety), its durability and its fulfillment—all as found in John 17:13ff. Christian joy can become the heart of worship for you. In Acts 16:25 we discover Paul and Silas, singing for joy at midnight in a Philippian jail—beaten, shackled in the depths of that facility. Perhaps Mercyme had them in mind as they wrote "It's My Joy"? Christian joy can endow you with cross-enduring patience, death defying courage and heaven securing obedience. Truly, **count it all joy when you encounter various trials** (James 1:2-8) because that is the example set for us in Hebrews 12:1-2: **Since we have so great a crowd of witnesses surrounding us, let us <u>also</u> lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race <u>that is set before us</u>, *fixing our eyes of Jesus,* the author and <u>perfecter of faith,</u> who *<u>for the joy set before Him</u>* endured the cross despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the Father** (of the throne of God)**.**

There are many sermons in these two verses—let us settle for a few observations. First, while some may assert that our faith is personal, a private affair, we know better. There is a great crowd of witnesses, in heaven and on earth, in this time warp and in eternity, who take note of how we live, of what we live for. So, the race we run is public. Second, we want to run to win, to run well. Therefore, we are to simplify our lives. Olympic runners wear sleek, gossamer shorts, shirts and numbers. Simple, light, non-encumbering! Don't let anything impede you in your performance—especially, don't get entangled with sin. Neither its distraction power, nor its temptation and certainly not its evil, guilt or shame. Getting off the mark, staying the course and keeping our focus—that's the right stuff! Paul and Silas didn't take much with them into jail. *But they did take their joy!* It helped them sing better. Third, there is a race. The course is set. The rules are in place and the goal is fixed. Now when runners train, they often have a pacer—someone who runs alongside, or in front, who keeps up the pace and sets the tempo. (This person, or device, is called a "rabbit." So it is intriguing that Lewis Carol has a white rabbit lead Alice into Wonderland to set the pace and direction of her adventures there. There is a course set!) As the runner follows the rabbit, just so we are to follow Jesus, **the author and perfecter of our faith.** There is a complication here with **the joy set before us.** Is it helpful to picture the joy as the winner's cup? Or is the joy to be found in the entire event, shot through the whole race, beginning to end? Yes, there was a specific point in time, on the cross, when Jesus' contempt for degradation, humiliation and shame reached a climax. But Jesus' joy was not summed up in that moment. Rather it coursed through HIs whole life. It was His joy to obey God in everything, in everyday, in every way, <u>all</u> the time with enormous consistency. That's what I mean by the cross-enduring patience, death-defying courage and heaven securing obedience which comes to those possessed of joy.

Here's the wonder: the joy of which I speak is a gift. Our text today records the request of Jesus: **But now I come to You** (**Holy Father-**v.11) **so that <u>they may have</u>**

My joy made full in themselves. (v. 13) What the Son requests, the Son receives. We simply need to pick it up; it is a gift—a requisitioned blessing!

Eric Liddell: I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure[1].

But now I come to You. (v.13) Jesus, in anticipation of His reunion with God the Father, expresses joy that the interruption, or separation, *as entailed in the incarnation* is soon ending; He is filled with joy. And, as I noted in last week's sermon, if we were thinking of Him rather than of ourselves (of how sad His leaving would make *us*, how lonely and bereft *we would feel*), we would **have rejoiced** (for Him) because nothing could be more wonderful for Him! In this way, we may account for some the joy in the countenances of those about to be martyred. Remember how Stephen's face shone with triumphant joy (**Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!** Acts 7:56) at the very moment of his execution. So, observe the progression: joy in Jesus, joy in Stephen, joy in Paul and Silas and joy in Christian martyrs, even those recently slain by ISIS on the shores of the Mediterranean this very year (2015).

Jesus, in John 17, is full of joy at going home. But, because He is thinking of us (always, ever more than of Himself) He exclaims: **and these things I speak in the world** (in these ears, in this present moment and situation, as we are in the world) **so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.** (v.13) What a pure wish of blessing, selfless and other-centered petition! I am really overjoyed to be reunited with You, Father God, but I want **My joy made full in themselves.** I want them as elated, thrilled and joyful as I am. Jesus has prayed for this to occur in us and prays even now. It is not enough for them just to be happy for Me going home . . . I want them completely overjoyed. Complete joy in the here and now.

I have given them Your word. (v.14) Yep. Straight up, clear and un-compromised. They are used to hearing the truth from Me and they are trying to speak the truth, in love, to one another more and more. But liars hate truth-tellers. Truth-tellers make others intensely uncomfortable because their every word exposes the motivations of those who would trip them up, deceive them and take advantage of them. That is the

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[1]From "Chariots of Fire."
Eric Liddell: You came to see a race today. To see someone win. It happened to be me. But I want you to do more than just watch a race. I want you to take part in it. I want to compare faith to running in a race. It's hard. It requires concentration of will, energy of soul. You experience elation when the winner breaks the tape - especially if you've got a bet on it. But how long does that last? You go home. Maybe your dinner's burnt. Maybe you haven't got a job. So who am I to say, "Believe, have faith," in the face of life's realities? I would like to give you something more permanent, but I can only point the way. I have no formula for winning the race. Everyone runs in her own way, or his own way. And where does the power come from, to see the race to its end? From within. Jesus said, "Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you. If with all your hearts, you truly seek me, you shall ever surely find me." If you commit yourself to the love of Christ, then that is how you run a straight race.

result of the gift of truth I have given them. **Your word is truth**. (v. 17) And the truth I have given them **sanctifies them**—it separates them, distinguishes them, purifies and holifies them. (I made it up, a new verb.) The word works a complete transformation in them—mind altering, heart transforming and character modifying. Entirely. There are two results of this *gift* of the word: it causes the believer to cease to be **of this world** and that draws down on the believer the enmity of the world. We frequently think of being hated for HIs sake; but on a deeper level we are hated for the word's sake. In a fallen world, the pure word of God cannot fail to alienate, to separate.

And, although I tremble to write these words, the word generates in us a joy that the world simply cannot comprehend, let alone support and sustain[2]. *This should be more obvious than it tends to be!* Entire joy is truly out of this world. It is proper to ask ourselves: how new, changed and free are we? The objective is not merely an altered state of consciousness (drugs and experience can temporarily affect that) *but an altered state of being.* The new creature we are in Christ is irreversible and permanent.

In this world you shall have tribulation, Jesus observes elsewhere**.** (John 16:13) True enough. He also declares: **Take heart! I have overcome the world.** But it is equally true that in this world, real Christians shall have joy. It is the Father's gift to us. Meanwhile, we shall also be friends with the truth. (The world cannot pull that one off—it can only counterfeit joy and truth![3]) I believe because we have joy, and we have truth. Now Jesus makes a strange (out of place?) petition: **I do not ask You to take them out of the world.**

What is He thinking!? Some days I am ready for nothing quite so much as an escort to heaven. Could He be leaving us here as salt, as a preservative or a purifying agent? O, right, we have a race to run; its course is set. Surely salt in the salt cellar is a wonderful thing, but that salt is meant to be spread about, sprinkled on food to enhance the flavor should not be lost on us. Be that as it may, the next thing Jesus asks for is both apt and priceless: I do ask You **to keep them from the evil one.** I guess that means that if we are tangling with the devil, we may be the ones bringing tribulation on!

Verse 16 seems to introduce a new line of thought. **They** (we!) **are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.** (vv.16-17) See Endnotes I don't believe that **your word is truth** adds anything new here but the train of thought is very consistent. If we are **not of the world** (v.14), the separation implied in **sanctify them** makes total sense. We are to be holy, we are to be good—not only in how we behave, but in who we are. As we pray for sanctifying grace

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[2] To be clear, the transformation I have in mind is a complete renovation (not window dressing, or external make-over with paint, shrubs and mown grass). We are talking about a total modification (not just the slipping on of another dress, or fashion piece for a stroll down the cat walk) as in *entirely new, absolutely different . . . radical transformation.* Slipping into a new pair, of born-again denims won't cut it, even if it is another size down!

[3] While political discourse riles us up, the Word of God revives us up! I want to be a joy walking, truth stalking, peace talking man of God . . . nothing less, certainly open to more.

(the effect of the word within) we hope to be set aside for His service, for God. We want to be "owned," acknowledged as placed by Him in that position. Christ's death purchased the Holy Spirit, who does this work of sanctifying the saints. So, we had better not be of the world! Not any more. Not in any extensive, or regular way. Christ is unique as the Mediator, through whom God effected our reconciliation; but we are to be reconcilers as His understudies. Jesus offered up His body and soul. These, in conjunction with His divine person made His sacrifice acceptable and effectual. Our sins were really atoned for, really covered, truly paid in full. Goats, bulls and sheep could not accomplish that! Not even lots of them. This is durable joy.

That is a very good thing because we are going to need a durable joy.[4] And that God has provided. Therefore when we are sent out, **As you sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world** (v.18)**,** we are fully equipped with truth, with holiness and with joy. Sanctification comes back into view now. The object of Christ's consecration is our separation, our severance from the world *in order for us to selflessly serve our King.* We must devote our lives to their sacred uses. And this is fulfilling joy! Jesus looks beyond our present lives, to the fruit that is anticipated through our word—which is His word and the Father's word. **I have given them your word** is the standard (in another place Jesus asserts **I only speak the words I hear my Father speaking** (John 12:49)). We are, correspondingly, under some obligation not to break the chain.

We are, at this point, very much attuned to the fundamental unity that Jesus now communicates: **that they may all be one, even as You, Father are in Me and I in You, that they may be in Us.** (v.21) We mustn't lose sight of this longing for our union with Him by sliding too quickly over the apologetic function of this union between God in heaven and man on earth through Christ. Let us give it due play. Unity is the expression of our reconciliation and our restoration. The objects of Christ's mission are manifest in the unity Christ prays for in this place. Such a glorious truth!

And that is precisely where Jesus takes us next in prayer: **The glory which You have given Me I have given them, that they may been, just as we are one.** (v.22) One in what? In unity and in glory. **I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity so that the world may know that You sent Me, (that) You loved them, even as You have loved Me.** (v.23)

So there you have it: complete joy through the petitions of the Lord, an entire joy because it is rooted in the whole truth; durable joy because the word equips us for the life of obedient service and fulfilling joy because the end of it all is our unity and our shared glory—the joy of the children come safely home at last, reconciled and fully restored. And, on the way there, may we lay claim to cross-enduring patience, death defying courage and heaven securing obedience. It's ours. Jesus put it on lay-away for all who believe.

[4] As well as a never-failing and amazing grace

I wish for you a complete, durable and fulfilling joy this Christmas!

Amen.

ENDNOTES:

M Henry: That they be made good (sanctify) not just kept from evil! Yea, be holy.
Disciples, pray for sanctifying grace (from Thy word, Thy truth).
Set them apart for Thyself and Thy service!
“Own them in the office”
“The real holiness of all true Christians is the fruit of Christ’s death . . . by which the gift of the Holy Spirit was purchased.”

Pulpit Commentary: for Christ this means separation unto His role as Mediator which, though done by the Father, and is ascribed unto Him. (John 10:36)

Gill: What he sanctified or offered was "himself": not his divine, but human nature, his body and his soul; and these as in union with his divine person; which gives his sacrifice the preference to all others, and is the true reason of its virtue and efficacy; and this is expressive of his great love.
He is offerer, hence the priest. He does this for His disciples, only those that the Father had given him. He was their surety. He atoned for their sins (really and truly) whereas the legal sacrifices only did so *typically*.

that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, Ephesians 1:4;

The object of Christ’s consecration to His work was the severance of His disciples from the world and their inspiration with the same spirit of self-sacrifice and devotedness to sacred uses. -Calvin

Pulpit Commentary:
The consecration effected in the disciples must correspond with Christ's consecration in self-sacrificial love, in abandonment to the power of the Word which has revolutionized their whole being, in entire equipment for their calling, even to the point of hatred and antagonism from the world, and death for his sake. They are indeed to drink of his cup, and be baptized with his baptism. They must be crucified with him and buried with him, and rise again with him, in the activity of their faith.