

“Right Off the Lips of Jesus”
 Sermon for 1 July 2018
 Text: John 15:5-11

5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, *and My words abide in you*, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so [become my disciples; or] prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.* 11 **These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. NASB**

The inspiration for this sermon came from two sources: first, from a hillside brook on our property in Sweden, Maine, which it was my assignment to clean and clear so that we would have a good supply of water for our project there; and second, from my devotional life, particularly two excerpts from The Writings of John Bradford. (1510-1555—scholar, royal chaplain, itinerant preacher, contender for the true faith and martyr, burned at the stake in the Marian persecutions under Queen Mary of Scotland.¹ There are two admonitions that strike me here: that **My words abide in you** and **If you keep my** commandments which set the context for understanding Jesus’ teachings about love and joy. Two things “right off the lips of Jesus”: 1. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you and 2. that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. (vv. 9 and 11)

John Bradford writing convicted me. It convicted me on two grounds: I was convicted on the basis of love, and on the basis of joy. That is what I acknowledged in the prayer I offered. I do not suppose that I am the only believer who has really struggled with love, and with joy. In particular, I have struggled with loving God as my heavenly Father . . . and I have struggled with what it means to love Jesus, shall I say evenly and deservedly. Loving him consistently with the love that he deserves for all that he has done for us, his disciples, is a very high standard and it is also very hard to sustain. There are seasons during which I love Jesus almost absent-mindedly. It is as if I know he’s there and I know that I do love him but the love is not warm, direct, passionate *as redemptive work warrants*. I ought to be more thankful everyday—it ought to be up here, not to one side on the shelf as it were. I wonder if a person can love Jesus theologically? Or abstractly? If I were to say, I love the idea of Jesus I might be in the ballpark of what I am trying to describe here. It is as if he is Lord without a “my” attached to it. My Lord, my Shepherd, my Savior. This intense sense of personal ownership seems more appropriate than a tepid, or coolish love—a take-for-granted, a presumption of regard.

¹(8 December 1542 – 8 February 1587 when she was beheaded, Queen Mary reigned from 1542-1567. She was a Stuart and a Roman Catholic.)

However, the text calls us up. What's in view here is **the Father's love** and not merely that but **the Father's love for the Son**. The difference between **the Father's love for the Son** and my love for either of them is like the difference between the Ozark's and the Rocky Mountains—or the Swiss Alps and the Chalk Cliffs of Dover. Immensely different in scale, in magnitude. The realization of this drives us to our knees—it means that the sacrifice the Father made in sending his Son to die for us is breathtakingly huge. This is not one person laying down his life for another—this is the Son of God laying down his life for us all. A great, great love, an incalculable mercy. As Newton writes: Amazing. When we partake of Jesus' broken body, at the Lord's Table, it is fitting that we exclaim over it: "And he did this for us?!" with wonder and amazement. Similarly, the new covenant in his shed blood: "Jesus expressed the Father's love for me by doing this?! So marvelous and so undeserved. Yes, and efficacious, too. For the stain of all our sins are taken utterly away, "irradicably"—as in as far as the east is from the west (there is no further removal!).

As to why I don't live as an entirely loved person—I have to resort to my complaint: "I am so earthly minded—I am so unthankful—a wretched *ingrate*, you could add. Such an ingrate as to be yet further undeserving. But **the Father's love** is not about me, my foibles, my shortcomings—no, the Father's love is about his mercy, his love, his compassion. It is about divine things, not human things.

So, too, we have Jesus taking this divine love of the Father, which has existed from forever between the Father and the Son, and he applies that love to us. He loved us with the love of the Father. Yes, it was one with his own love. So both the Father and the Son, one God, impart divine love together to the believer's heart: a merciful love, a love full of redemptive power and grace and truth and life. And by faith we receive and participate in a love which is higher, bigger and better than anything we could hope to concoct of our own resources. The whole business is one of distribution and, as we must be greatly relieved to confess, not a matter of manufacturing. Divine love is infinite in supply because of its source in the Father. When our human love plays out, we are not released from loving one another because that is where and when the Father's love comes into play.

Moving on to joy, we see that something of the same dynamic is at play here. The joy known as **My joy** is a divine joy—something only the Son of God possessed but which, in astonishing generosity, he is willing to impart to those who love and follow him. His disciples. And Jesus prays for his joy to be in us to the full. And as his joy was experienced, tasted and anticipated, so it is to be in us—in each of us up to the brim and over.

Imagine visiting a lovely waterfall in the peak of a hot August. It's 95+ in the shade and the cold refreshing water is gushing out and down. Now imagine further, that some very overheated hikers are in the waterfall; its flowing all around them and they are happily and joyfully being refreshed. That is a good picture of the fullness of joy that Jesus means with **that your joy may be made full**. Now if we were to widen our lens and take in another group of equally heated hikers, sitting on the rocks, ledge and boulders near by in the splash of the cataracts. The cool mist dampens them and, while that is nice, even pleasant, that is not full refreshment. Nor is dipping your toes the same thing as either wading, or, gasp, swimming! Fullness of joy is immersion.

Now here is where the two come together, It is the love of God, the overflow of his free, good will towards us, which produces the joy. We are loved by a God whose power is almighty . . . whose goodwill is boundless. . . and his Son imputes his joy to every believer. Love and joy are only two of our heavenly blessings, part of the benefits in the plan of salvation for every believer and not just me. Please let's not despise these benefits, not disregard them, nor dismiss them **as if they are not real or could not possibly be possessed by lowly creatures such as we.**

God loves us to make us worthy and, in the process, he has chosen to also make us glad. So, if I do tend to be proud and forgetful in the good times, and if I do fall into impatience when things are not going so swimmingly, what is there for me to do but to wake up, repent? Am I really so very different than some of you sitting in the pews?

If I try to dig up the refuse of the past, I have loving brothers and sisters who can call me out—don't be so yesterday, pastor. We are blessed this day and we have such a future. Toss aside the disappointing and polish off the hope—who knows but this passing affliction was sent to spiff us up and burnish our armor. I ask you to splash this grace on me, and I will soak you back!

I want to lead out with some praise this morning! With gladness I am reporting, that as lately as June 26, 2018, I have repented of my unbelief in certain deep matters of love and joy. I thank God that the good work, accomplished on my knees—raking my muck from my brook, and removing my stones from my brook on my time with my family—and that all these blessings, which are mine. were vouchsafed me by my God and my Savior. Out of the kindness of the Lord, out of his sufficiency and his storehouse, all these benefits, all these blessings, have been granted to us for our enjoyment—which means we are so very blessed! Therefore let us all take joy in them presently, mindful that if God in his mercy had not knelt, had not condescended through Jesus and the Spirit to rake the muck from the clogged fountains of our souls and purified us heart by heart from within; if God had not so revealed his love to us through our Savior, according to his Word, none of us would not know the wonders of his provision, of the safety of his protection—I see that he has been great, and good and gracious to me. How about you?! And I, being so fondly redeemed and renewed, sanctified and regenerated, I am bound to say so:

**Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!
Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.
whom he has redeemed from trouble
and gathered in from the lands . . . Psalm 107:1-3a**

Yes, I know that the psalmist is exulting in the redemption of God's people from exile originally, but I have had my own foreign lands to be gathered from, my own span of alienation, my own spiritual exile to be redeemed out of. A well to be pulled out of, a crevice in the floor to be swept up from! And God has done it; he and none other for I was unable to rescue myself and, while I am grateful for friends and encouragement along the way, truly grateful and blessed, all of them together were insufficient to accomplish what God alone did do. He is my Savior, my Deliverer, my Lord and my Friend. He has exceeded, more that met:

**My hunger and thirst . . .delivered me from distress and trouble . . .
 guided me by the straight way . . . put a roof over my head and a family
 in my arms . . .he entrusted me with his love which I am to give to them
 . . . he satisfies my soul with good things. . . mended the mess of my
 rebellion . . . has saved my life innumerable times, yes, even out of
 darkness and death . . . healed me from grievous wounds, betrayals
 and hurts . . . And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and tell of his
 deeds in songs of joy! (vv.4-22)**

Is it any wonder that we seek at this church to help everyone know, love and
 worship our God?! We may need to ask forgiveness afresh and pray for the eyes of
 our minds to be re-opened—yes, and, what is more, re-focused on the good, the
 true, the pure and the beautiful—all that which is noble and of good report.

We are here to help each other up!

We want fresh anointings, refreshed knowledge, personal and
 persuasive encounters with our Lord and King!

With your divine presence reveal your wisdom, your holiness and
 goodness in person!

Help us to love you more.

*INFLAME OUR AFFECTIONS, IGNITE THEM SO THAT WE DESIRE
 NOTHING ON EARTH OR IN HEAVEN BUT YOU—TO BE PRESENT WITH
 YOU, TO LOVE, TO KNOW AND TO WORSHIP YOU ONLY.*

Amen.