

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and so that your joy may be complete.

What is joy?

- not happiness, which depends on external conditions
- deep, deep wellspring within the heart and soul
- it's a gift, better translated "so that your joy may be completed, may be fulfilled," not about what we do ourselves but about Christ's action in us when we abide, dwell, live in him

Joy is a gift, yet we are so very good at putting up barriers to it.

- we have it as children. Whoever wants to receive the kingdom must receive it as a little child; young kids skipping and playing and not self-conscious, happy to help others (Craig helping clean up after messy church and other events), wanting to ease the hurting of others (bringing a crying friend a favourite stuffed animal, Mommy OK?)
- most of us could probably name the moment in our childhood when that came to an end, when someone made us doubt ourselves, made us question the goodness of the world.
- we got hurt, and we put up barriers to protect ourselves
- problem is that those same barriers act as shields against joy, too
  
- parable of sower, that word of God (joy of God) is sown for everyone but some of us are so worried and distracted by the cares and busyness of this life that the joy gets choked out before it can fully grow; what are the weeds that keep us from experiencing God's joy
- to use another metaphor, last week we heard Jesus speak of being the vine, and us as the branches, and that sometimes God needs to prune away the things that get in the way of bearing fruit; what are the barriers in our lives that God needs to prune away? (worldly notions of what success and happiness are supposed to look like? our own or others' expectations of us? the desire for praise from others?)
  
- sometimes the biggest barrier is a profound misunderstanding about what joy is. American constitution, the pursuit of happiness, have to go outside of ourselves to find it. It's actually there, deep within. Those moments when we feel most fully alive, when we feel most fully ourselves, that we are fully living as the person God created us to be, that there is joy. And it is never, ever about things like winning the lottery or the Academy Award, whatever the commercials or TV shows might say. It is never about having a new outfit or the latest gadget, those things are fun and that's not wrong. But it's not joy.

George Bernard Shaw puts it: "This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one: the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap, and being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

The world, of course, will not devote itself to making us happy, and even our pursuit of happiness will probably not make us happy.

Joy is about two things; learning to be fully content with who we are where we are, and taking who we are and living our lives in service to God and to others.

Jesus was saying these things on the night before he died, and he knew it. This is part of what biblical scholars call the farewell discourse, his conversation with the disciples after the footwashing, sitting at the last supper, before they headed to the Garden of Gethsemane. And he tells them that finding joy is found in living as he did, in loving as he did, and ultimately, in laying down our lives for our friends, in self-emptying service to one another even to the point of death.

Leo Tolstoy said, "Joy can be real only if people look upon their life as a service."

Our culture totally does not understand this. Neither did his. St. Paul would later write that the cross would confuse both Jews, who were looking for signs and miracles and not this painful death, and Greeks, Gentiles who were looking for great wisdom and not this seeming capitulation to the powers that be.

The voice of our culture urge us to hide our insecurities and our weaknesses and to protect our hearts and souls from being hurt by putting up walls, by erecting barriers, to hide our love away.

Jesus tells us the opposite. By his life and death, and by his teachings, he reminds us that only by loving extravagantly, loving even those who would betray us, do we find meaning; only by laying down our lives for others do we live the life we were created to live. Only by being vulnerable to God and to others do we pull down those barriers to allow God to make our joy complete within us.