

Sixth Sunday of Easter “Joyful, Living Fruit People”

Acts 10:44-48; Ps 98; 1 Jn 5:1-6; Jn 15:9-17

Last week I talked about living as a “branch” of Jesus, about abiding in the living “Vine” of God. Well, today, Jesus tells us, his disciples, that we are appointed “to go;” “to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.” (Jn 15.16b) What exactly is this “Fruit” that will last? This fruit that never dies?

We are to be “fruit-bearing” disciples of Jesus Christ. Just like Deacon Philip from our readings last Sunday, we too are called; called to go out into the world to make *more* disciples. We are to be Fruit Bearers, Living Fruit People; loving the way that Jesus loved; and bearing fruit through our joyful discipleship. Jesus wants us to “obey his commandment [to love one another],” to love as He loves, so that, as he says: “My joy may be **in** you, and [therefore] your joy may be complete.” (Jn 15.11)

Remember, “joy” is a fruit of God’s Spirit [Gal 5:22]. That is why Jesus says that by “bearing much fruit” it brings glory to God and it shows that we are His disciples. Take a minute to think about “Joy.” True joy is something people want to share. True joy flows out of healthy relationships embedded in love and in trust. This “joy of Christ within us” brings us to a subtle yet, I think, highly significant statement by Jesus, and a major shift in our role in discipleship. It is a moment when the relationship, between Jesus and his disciples, changes. The role of the disciples changes. This comes when Jesus says to his disciples: “I do not call you servants any longer; ... I have called you friends,” (Jn. 15:15) It seems such a simple statement and yet, it has profound implications. We disciples are no longer “servants.” Now, we are the “friends” of Jesus. It’s been said that: “Friends are the people who know us all too well, and yet, ...love us anyway.” Friends see us not as we are, but as we can be. They are the ones in whom we can confide our deepest longings and share our closest secrets.

I have also heard it said: “You will always be my best friend, because, you know too much!” The bonds between friends is every bit as strong and, in many cases, stronger than the ties with our actual relatives. Although tied to our families by biology or adoption, friends are a “family” of a *different* sort. Friends are the “families” of our choice. So, as the “friends” of Jesus, we are his “family of choice!” Jesus goes on to say: “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” (Jn. 15:15-16) There is something profoundly comforting and reassuring in knowing that you have been “chosen.” To be “chosen” is to feel valued. It means that the other person cares about you, trusts you, and that you can count on them in return.

In today’s Gospel passage, Jesus already knows about his impending death, and he shows concern that his disciples might forget who they are, thus Jesus reassures them that they were important and that he values them as more than mere servants. “You are my friends,” Jesus says. And in doing so, Jesus elaborates upon the unbreakable bond, that remarkable bond, that exists between them, that exists only between “friends.”

Moreover, *because of* this bond of “friendship,” Jesus can now commend to his disciples a unique way of life; a way of life through which the bonds of friendship can sustain them, regardless the many

adversities of life. Jesus tells them: *“Love one another, as I have loved you.”*(15:12) The distinction Jesus makes between servants and friends is intentional and the difference has everything to do with love. A servant is compelled to do what they are told to do. But, we cannot *compel* a person to “love” us. Love can only be given freely. That means that friends are there for us, not because they feel compelled to stand with us, but because they want to stand with us.

Jesus knew that neither wealth nor power could safely or fully see us through the hard times of life, the times when we can feel completely alone and forgotten. Only the love of a friend can do that, can see us through. A friend who is a lot like: Jesus; someone who “knows us all too well and yet, loves us anyway.” And that knowledge, the knowledge of Christ’s abiding “love” *for* us and *in* us, becomes the source of our “Joy”—the radical joy of being loved and being trusted to bear “fruit” in his Kingdom.

Jesus knew that the radical joy of his love would make us “fruitful people.” The joy from his love and friendship would enable us, his disciples, to overcome any problems or challenges we may face. Jesus knew that we could have “Joy,” even when everything in our life says that we should not have it; all because we abide in his Love...in his Friendship...in his Joy. Joyful people think differently and act differently. As Christians, we are different. We are different because Christ’s joy makes us “Living Fruit” people.

The Joy that Jesus gives to us is so abundant, so complete, that it overflows. It is like filling a glass with water. There comes a point when the glass is full—yet when it overflows, it runs everywhere—across the table and down on to the floor. That is the type of joy that Jesus wants us to have;... a joy so overflowing that, when other people are around us, it gets on them, because being joyful is contagious.

Today, Jesus proclaims that *“we are his friends”* and that we must *“love one another.”* So let us be the bold, let us be the passionate, let us be the joyful and fruitful people that Christ desires us all to be, as we go into this vast world to: *“bear fruit that will last.”* For only when we become “joy-filled” Fruit Bearers, Living Fruit People, will we ultimately fulfill Christ’s Great Commission: *“to go and make disciples of all people.”*(Mt 28:19) Because making new disciples, new “friends of Jesus,” that is the *real* fruit of, Joyful, “Living Fruit People!”.... fruit that never dies.

Jesus said, *“I Chose You! You are my Friends! Be Joyful! Share that Joy and be Fruitful! Love One Another and Bear Fruit for my Kingdom.... because, I Love You! I Chose You! You are my Friend and I Love You! Share my Joy and be Fruitful!”*

“All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.” Ps 98:4b