

2016_07_03 Pastor Pfeiffer's Farewell Sermon
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

A Farewell in Two Words:

Joy and Love

1. Rejoice because His joy remains with you
2. Love one another as He has loved you

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The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to you all. Amen.

Not too far back, I was talking with Tammy, one of our new members about her impression of our worship services. She responded with a question: "Pastor, why does everyone sit all over the place?" She noticed how the people in the pews at our church are kind of scattered all over the place. She then told me how she sometimes likes to introduce herself to people who have no one sitting next to them. I thought about it; you know she's got a point—why do we sit all over the place? I began to think of how this is a bit indicative of our lives. We are all a bit scattered.

Actually, when I first got here, I discovered how scattered we are—geographically that is. I decided to map out the membership and see how spread out our members are. I got on Google, and began creating a map of all the members households. When I finished, I sat back and looked at the pin markers. The pins were as far as an hour north to McHenry county, 45 minutes east to Palentine, an hour to downtown, 40 minutes to Downers Grove, an hour or so south to Mazon—we are a bit scattered.

But its more than just geography were are talking about. I responded to Tammy with a few explanations. Well, its sort of a Lutheran thing. Lutherans just don't like to sit too close, or to be too close to the front. Then again, its sort of a practical thing. If we all sat right next to each other with our small group, there would be many empty pews—so we spread out to fill the church. But then I told her how really, this may be a personality thing. All in all, we are kind of a shy church. We aren't used to being too close to each other or being too involved in each other's lives. The busy metropolis atmosphere can make its way into a rather distant way of looking at the fellowship we share. It can make us feel like it is best to keep each other at a safe distance.

Still, I would like to think we've come a long way in this regard since I first got here. In fact, this is one of the great joys I've been privileged to be a part of. Over five

years, I've seen the Lord working steadily, bringing us closer together, strengthening us in the love of Christ, and moving us to care about each other. And this stage of your lives is only a stepping stone for God's Spirit.

In our text from John chapter 15, Jesus addresses his disciples about his departure. He knows he is soon to leave them. They are worried, afraid, a bit scattered. In fact, they will soon be scattered to the point of abandoning their Lord on the cross to save their own skin. What will happen next?

Today, I'd like to use just two words to say farewell. These are Jesus' words, the same words as Jesus leaves with his disciples. What Jesus leaves with you is what I leave with you. And those two words are **Joy and Love**. Firstly, **rejoice because His joy remains with you**. Secondly, **love one another as He has loved you**. So Jesus says to his disciples:

John 15:11–12

These things I have spoken to you,
that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.
This is My commandment,
that you love one another as I have loved you.

This Word of the Lord is spoken for you.

We pray, Lord, sanctify us by your truth, your word is truth. Amen.

In the name of Him who fills us with all joy and love, dear beloved brothers and sisters,

1. Rejoice because His joy remains with you

Jesus was preparing to say goodbye. Chapters 13-17 record Jesus' final discourse, a lengthy teaching and prayer he addresses to his disciples. He knows what is going to happen; he knows he is going to leave them and return to his father in heaven; and he wants to assure them that in the midst of sorrow, his joy will not depart from them.

This begins in chapter 13 of John where Jesus kneels at the feet of his disciples. He has clothed himself as a slave; wrapped in a towel, filling a bowl of water, and kneeling at the dirty feet of his disciples. He gives them a new commandment: that they should love one another as he has loved them.

Then in chapter 14 Jesus promises his Spirit. He will not leave them orphans, but will come to them by the inspiration of His Spirit. They will never be alone.

In chapter 15, Jesus here pictures himself as the vine, the source from which all nourishment and life comes; without this, there is no fruit; we should then abide in him always, and live from him.

In chapter 16, Jesus tells his disciples that he is leaving them and that this will be a sad time. They will have sorrow—yet, like a woman giving birth, this sorrow will soon give way to joy. He previews the outcome, the death that gives way to life, he looks to his resurrection as the source of all joy, a joy that will not leave them.

Then, in chapter 17, he bows his head and prays. He prays that his disciples will continue in his word and will remain united, even as Jesus is one with his father.

Chapters 18 and 19 take us to judgment and to the cross where the sorrow strikes deep. The death he suffers leaves his disciples scattered, confused, lost.

But he does not leave them lost. He appears in chapter 20 risen and alive; with pierced hands open and outstretched, he breathes life on them and says “Rejoice!”

We began this year with a prayer for joy. In my annual letter, we reflected on the words of David in Psalm 51; here we found a prayer—a prayer to God that he would “restore the joy of salvation” to us. Well, has he? Has he given you something to rejoice about?

Maybe its more of the sorrow that you remember. The sorrow of sin is with us daily—we are scattered in our foolish pursuits of what will make us happy, looking to this pleasure and that earthly goal to satisfy our latest itch... we are scattered in our selfish past, we’ve hurt others, ruined relationships and then blamed God on top of it ... Isaiah writes, “they have each turned, everyone to his own way.” This is why we are here today, kneeling before God’s throne and bowing at the foot of the cross in the sorrow that is so real; we are there with the confused disciples who do not know what to do—Jesus is leaving, Jesus is dying.

And yet where is the Gospel of John taking us. Chapter after chapter, Jesus preparing us for what comes next. He must go away, so that he could come again. The sorrow of labor pains will give way to something better; the sorrow of the Jesus’ suffering gives way to the joy of knowing his resurrection. This is the joy that remains,

and with pierced hands open and arms outstretched he gives to us in full measure; he breathes life on us and says, "Rejoice!"

There may be sorrow today. Saying goodbye is sad. But although you say good bye to one pastor, there remains a joy that does not go away. Whatever sorrow—whether sin or guilt, sickness or struggle, life or death—Jesus has given you a joy that remains forever in His resurrection; this is the driving force of this whole story. Chapter after chapter of your life, Jesus speaks to you again and again, until he finally bows his head in prayer, offers up His very life for you, and comes to life for you always. **Rejoice because His joy remains with you.**

2. Love one another as He has loved you

Joy and love. Two words that draw us together today. No matter how scattered, this keeps us united. No matter how I might miss you or think of you in South Carolina, I always know that the love we share will never be broken. What Jesus leaves with you is what I leave with you—a commandment: Love one another as He has loved you.

When I announced to North Aurora Care Center that I would be leaving, someone asked for a picture of our family to remember us. I knew I would miss those folks, just like I will miss you. So I printed off a card with a picture of our kids, and wrote on it, "We'll miss you!" This reminded me what a blessing it is to share fellowship. What a blessing it is to miss someone. Missing someone means that you love someone. And that is exactly what Jesus has on his mind as he talks with his disciples.

Jesus knows they will miss him, as he will miss them. This is why he is determined not to leave them, but to remain with them. And the way that he will do this is in the remembrance of his love and enactment of his presence in the Lord's Supper. This binds us together in Christ and his body and blood which we will share today. When we say, "Take, eat; take and drink"—Jesus is no longer so far off—in fact, none of us are scattered anymore. This supper joins us together in the bond of Jesus' love so that he remains among us and goes with us.

By sharing himself with us and in us, he leaves behind a picture. This is a picture far better than one of my family! And it is right here. Here in these scattered pews is a picture of Christ. For together you have eaten of him, you have drank of his blood and you live in his love. The fellowship of his Word and the expression of His love that you share is a picture that never fades.

If there is anything that I could leave with you, this is it! Love one another. Love each other as Christ has loved you. This is the love I have for you—however imperfect it may have been, and trust me, there has been plenty of imperfect love, sins, and failures on my part—yet, the love remains. So keep on loving each other. This is the picture of Christ which fills this church, wall to wall, Christ, and His gospel, the power of salvation, gathering us together—no matter where we come from, or where we go—Jesus' simple word is your constant strength and unity—Love one another as he has loved you.

Sure we are scattered, no doubt about it. Just look at a map of our congregation—members all over the place, busy metropolis, membership turn over, here we are, a scattered bunch. Yes, we sit all over the place—Its a bit of a Lutheran thing... Its a bit of a practical thing... and, perhaps, its a bit of a social thing. And yet, look at all the Lord has done and will continue to do.

Think of the bread distribution that we've gotten involved in and how that continues to be an opportunity for outreach. Think of the care center ministries and how the voters unanimously voted to maintain those efforts into future ministries. Think of the last few voters meeting where the men have been taking leadership responsibilities, purchasing a new mower, conducting lay services, holding call meetings. Think of the new members that have just joined the church and how excited they are—to the point that when I mentioned an upcoming work day, Sandy and Tammy perked up with enthusiasm and said, "How can we help?"

What Jesus leaves with you, I leave with you. In the words of an old German saying: *Aufedersein*. My grandfather used to always say that this is a good bye that a Christian can always say to another Christian. It means "till I see you again." And that is something all Christians can say; namely, we will see each other again—Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ is coming again. So then, fellow Christians, till I see you again, *Aufedersein*. Amen.