

I had such a good time on Friday night this week. The theme for Friday Night Live was abject, complete and utter joy, and the special guests were the Swing Sisters – three women, one of whom is Ellen Kennedy, a regular cast members for Friday Night Live. Donned in bright red jackets, looking a bit like they'd stepped from the pages of a 1945 Vogue Magazine, the Swing Sisters sing in the style of the Andrews Sisters. They sang Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree, Straighten Up and Fly Right, Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy...and I couldn't wipe the silly grin off my face.

There was something in the water that night because the cast from AddLibretto couldn't contain themselves. They were making themselves laugh. In the opening sketch, Allan Marriot and Michael Robinson had to be one person on a date with Ellen Kennedy. When asked, someone in the audience suggested the nice thing to bring on a date was chocolate. Well Michael and Allan got into this hilarious moment after they referred to Ellen's weight problem....the gaff just didn't end. It was the funniest night....and references to Ellens thunder thigh's showed up all through the evening. I don't think I've heard as much laughter at from the actors on any other Friday Night Live.

If you haven't checked out Friday Night Live yet...I so encourage you. The event will celebrate its first anniversary on June 1.

And then to top it off, Rosemary Postelwaite whispered something to me so lovingly and yet so filled with good humor, I had a huge belly laugh just before I got up for my coffee.

With all that laughter, I got to thinking about joy. Joy is something more than happiness. Happiness is one of those fleeting emotions upon which not very much can be trusted. I don't I'd go to the bank on emotions...anger, happiness, sadness, fear. Joy is something more than an emotional response. Joy is a state of being. Like the peace that surpasses all understanding, that we share at the beginning of the service, joy is heart full of gratitude, a life overflowing in abundance, relationships that call us into the very best of who we might become. And complete joy is what Jesus promises in this passage, as we enter into love.

There are a couple of things that stand out for me in this text this morning. The first is an invitation to abide in Jesus' love, in the way that he abided in God's love. There's that word again. We encountered that word – abide – in last week's passage when we compared ourselves to branches on the vine stock of life – for us that would be the living Christ. Abide in me, like the branch abides in the stock.

Today, we are invited into an abiding love. To abide in Jesus love. In his book "What's so Amazing about Grace" Philip Yancy writes this anecdote: Not long ago I received in the mail a postcard from a friend that had on it only six words, "I am the one Jesus loves." I smiled when I saw the return address, for my strange friend excels at these pious slogans. When I called him, though, he told me the slogan came from the author and speaker Brennan Manning. At a seminar, Manning referred to Jesus' closest friend on earth, the disciple named John, identified in the Gospels as "the one Jesus loved." Manning said, "If John were to be asked, 'What is your primary identity in life?' he would not reply, 'I am a disciple, an apostle, an evangelist, an author of one of the four Gospels,' but rather, 'I am the one Jesus loves.'"

Would we identify ourselves as the one Jesus' loves? What would it mean for us to do that? If someone asked you why you came to church, what would it be like for you to say in return "I come because I am one Jesus loves?" Rather than look in the mirror and see all the warts we see in ourselves, what if we looked in the mirror and saw the one that Jesus loves. I wonder how your day would go. It's hard isn't it, to imagine that we might be loved beyond what we think of ourselves. Does it put a smile on your face? Abide in this love, says Jesus, so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete.

Beyond happy...beyond angry...beyond afraid...beyond sad...to abide in the love that Jesus holds out, regardless of who we are or what we have or what we believe about ourselves...in this love we can live in a state of being...a state of joy. We can live in joy, even though we might have other emotional responses.

The second thing that stands out for me in this passage is the commandment to love each other as we have been loved. Up to this point, the gospel writer has been using the Greek word *agape* as he writes about love. Now, the gospel writer flips to the word *philio* ... a word that means brotherhood, connection, person to person. This is the word of love for equals....friends. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved. You are my friends if you do what I command you.

I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything....”

I have made known to you everything....says Jesus to his friends, at least according to John....and how John might have imagined Jesus to have said that. And primarily it's how to love. This is *philio* love and it doesn't have anything to do with how you feel, it's how you respond. It's about an action you take. Like *agape* love which to the ancient Greeks had its source in God, *philio*, the love between mutual friends has no affect really, its about loyalty and commitment, and service and presence. It's a commitment we make regardless of how we feel. Our model? - loving in the way that Jesus loved.

The last couple of weeks we have experimented with an idea. If we take the doctrine of incarnation seriously, trusting in the gospel of John's own promise that the spirit of God is within us. And if God is revealed in life, all of life, most perfectly revealed in Jesus and we will do greater things than these because Jesus is with the father, then we've been playing with the idea that we might be the ones to say to ourselves, the words Jesus says to his followers. We're the ones who need to own the fact that "I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me." We need to say "I am the vine, you are the branches, abide in me as I abide in you."

What happens when we say these words as if they come from our mouths? What happens when we say "love one another as I have loved you?" When we put these words in our mouths and taste them, I recognize that this is exactly what happens when we don't first love ourselves. People do ending up loving each other in exactly the ways in which they are loved. And I feel sad when I think of generations of family violence, generations of family sexual abuse. I think of how kids are bullied on the play ground and how bullied kids become bullies.

The flip side is also true. Especially when we remember to look into the mirror and imagine ourselves to be the ones Jesus' loves. When we love with compassion, the people in our company will love with compassion. When we love with abundance rather than scarcity, people will also love with the same attitude. Love with curiosity, rather than judgment, what joy fills our hearts. Its really interesting, and while this kind of loving can be difficult, it can happen in a moment, especially when we change the way we look in the mirror.

I am the one Jesus loves. So are you. As incredible as that seems to me sometimes, when I think about being loved in this way, where someone stands with me regardless of all my faults and mistakes, I am empowered to do the same. What joy! Amen.