

# Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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April 30, 2006  
3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter  
1 John 1:1-4  
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Acts 4:8-12  
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 118  
Second Lesson: 1 John 1:1-2:2  
Gospel: Luke 24:36-49

## Complete Joy

It's obvious that we live in a world that is no longer perfect. We endure the effects of sin. We live in a world that is corrupted by sin. But even as such, earth does not remain a desert drear because while we live in this world, our Lord allows us to enjoy various things. Have you ever had those times in your life when you wish the night wouldn't come to an end or the day wouldn't come to an end because you are enjoying yourself so much visiting with family and friends—reliving pastimes or just sitting down around a table and laughing and laughing until your sides hurt, and you don't notice that all of a sudden it is 1:00 a.m. You don't really want to leave but you pretty much have to. In this lifetime, the Lord does grant us some of those times where we would just like to bottle the moment and make it last. Do you know what I mean? The problem is that we live in a world that is sinful and those times come to an end and we go back to face some of the challenges that come with a life in a sinful world.

When John begins his letter to his children in the faith, when he is writing to them to encourage them and build them up because their faith was being attacked by some false teachings about who Jesus is, he talks about times of complete joy. He mentions one place that you and I would expect that John would tell us to find complete joy—that is in Christ; the One who has redeemed us; the One who has opened the door to heaven for us and the One who promises to be with us no matter what we face in this sinful world. We would expect that because we have experienced that and we know that and that is why we are here this morning. But the other place he talks about finding complete joy and he writes so that his joy may be made complete might surprise us. He talks about finding complete joy in the fellowship that exists not only between him and God, but the fellowship that exists between him and the people that he is writing to—his fellow believers in Christ. That might be surprising to us and it might point out some places where we sometimes fall short in our lives and where we need our joy to be made complete in Christ. The truth of the matter is that we probably don't always view our brothers and sisters in Christ as a source of joy. Instead we often sit around and nitpick things that we don't like about each other.

This morning our Lord speaks to us through John and he talks to us about ways that we find complete joy in a sinful world. It is in Christ and it is in our fellow Christians. What a wonderful truth it is that we can see this morning. John is writing because there were those that were teaching that Jesus was not true God from all eternity. They were saying that while he was on earth he was a man, who at his baptism had the Logos, or the Word, come upon him and the divine essence dwell in him until he was betrayed and crucified and it left him. So only a man died. Well, if only a man died, then we have

a problem, right? The Book of Psalms says that *No man can redeem the life of another...the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough* (Psalm 49:7-8). If Jesus dies only as true man, we have no fellowship with God.

So John writes and he starts right out talking about the Word—Logos—the Greek word that means Word—about the Word of life that they had seen, that they had touched, that they had spent time with, and that Word appeared and that Word is Jesus. That is what he is talking about. The Word of life in our text is really Jesus. Just like in the first section of his Gospel when he says, *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1). Do you remember that? He is talking about Jesus. So he says the life appeared. He is talking about Jesus. *...we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us* (1 John 1:2). Then he says *our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ* (1 John 1:3).

When he talks about fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus, we need to be pretty clear on what he is talking about. By nature we don't have this fellowship, because by nature we are born sinful, and we are separated from God. We are born enemies of God. We consider God's truth foolishness until his Spirit works in our hearts to lead us to believe that a Jewish carpenter died two thousand and some years ago and that took away our sins. On our own we are going to consider it foolishness. The Spirit leads us to see these truths so that we can have fellowship. But the word "fellowship" itself—you know we use the word "fellowship" kind of loosely at times. We will tell people to come over for the meal and enjoy food and fellowship. Or come to the basement after church and enjoy food and fellowship. So as a kid growing up you might think that fellowship means spilling a little coffee on your white shirt before you go home and that is what fellowship is, or getting some cookie crumbs all over the floor that the janitor is going to have to sweep up later. That certainly can be a way that we express fellowship with one another, but it is more than that. We certainly express our fellowship with God when we receive his body and blood at the Lord's Supper, but fellowship is more than just eating. It is this intimate, close connection.

Think of how God pictures our fellowship with God. He talks about Jesus and his bride—the church. He uses that imagery of husband and wife, that kind of close, intimate connection. Fellowship with God is that, and it is even beyond that. It is this closeness that we have that allows us to cry out to God as our Father; not our judge, not the creator of the world who is all powerful and hates sin and will crush all sin. But we can call out to him as "our Father, who art in heaven" because he has made us his children even though we are not that on our own. Even though we are born separated from God and the sins we commit separate us from God, God comes, sends Jesus, and Jesus lives in our place, dies in our place, perfectly does everything that we fail to do, and now the Spirit leads us to believe that—so we have this fellowship with God. We walk intimately with God, closely with God. It is an intimate connection that goes beyond just friendship, but a closeness that is living and real.

Think of how the Bible talks about fellowship with God. When God warns us against sexual sins in Corinthians, do you remember what he says? Why would you go and

unite yourself with a prostitute? *Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you* (1 Corinthians 6:19). God lives IN US—that is the sense of fellowship, this closeness that we have. Jesus once said that when people say, ‘*Here it is*,’ or ‘*There it is*,’ don’t believe it *because the kingdom of God is within you* (Luke 17:21). Christ lives in you through faith.

Fellowship with God is something that we rejoice in. It is something that we could not bring about by ourselves, but it is something that we treasure because we know that no matter what we go through in this world, we have a God who loves us that much and walks that closely with us. That is why we can make our joy complete in fellowship with Christ, because we have experienced that. We know that. When things are going bad, instead of looking away from God or blaming God, when we look to God, we find a joy that is not based on our outward circumstances. It is based on who God is and what he has done for us. That is what we always talk about as the “joy that passes human understanding.” It is there and it guards us and it keeps us because God is that close to us, because John testified to the truth, the others testified to the truth and through their testimony and through the water and the Word, the Holy Spirit led us to believe that Jesus is our Savior and we walk that close with him.

I think we can understand that as a way to make our joy complete. When we are facing difficulty, the more we focus on Jesus, the more we are going to find comfort and peace. In those times in life when we focus on things other than Jesus—the things that trouble us, the things that make our lives difficult—we find less comfort and less peace and more stress and more anxiety and probably more ulcers. I think we can understand that. But this idea that John writes about is a little more difficult for us to grasp. He was writing these things so that the people that he was writing to would have fellowship, not only with Jesus, which would bring him joy, but so that they also would have fellowship with him, which would give him great joy.

That is one of the truths that we learn—*so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others* (Romans 12:5). We are to use our gifts to build one another up and to serve one another and to encourage one another. Think about those truths—as Christians we have this closeness with one another like husband and wife, the same picture that God uses. There exists among us a bond that unites us that is far greater than anything that would drive a wedge between us, but think of how often Satan excels at keeping us from seeing this truth. Think of how often he gets us to speak about fellow believers as “they” and “them.” When we are having a cup of coffee some place and we talk about, “I don’t know what those people at that church are doing? What are they thinking? Why are they making those decisions?” We fail to see and treasure that fellowship that God says is not “they” and “them”, it is not “us” and “them”, but it is “we”. God has called us to be the body of Christ, here in this congregation, to love one another and serve one another and encourage one another and comfort one another and strengthen one another with the gifts he has given us. Instead of using those gifts sometimes we are just way too busy nitpicking each other, blaming others, and when we are doing that, we are not serving the body of Christ and using the gifts God has given us.

I don't know that we always treasure the fellowship that we have, this closeness that we have in having the same faith, the same mind, and the same purpose as Paul writes that he wants us to have in Corinthians. But I am convinced we are poorer for it when we miss this truth. So what is the answer? The answer, of course, is to say, "Lord, forgive us for the times when we have done this. Forgive me for the times I have failed to see that my brothers and sisters in Christ are just that—brothers and sisters. They are the family of God that you have placed me in. Forgive me for not appreciating them and not looking to them as a source of joy in my life."

When we see that Christ has taken away all sins, not just the ones that we think are big, but the ones God says are sins—which includes neglecting this fellowship as a source of joy—when we see that God has forgiven us and taken away that sin and that he loves us and lifts us up, back on our feet, and says, "You are forgiven. Now go and sin no more." As his Spirit strengthens us, we will see what a blessing that we have to be here at this place, at this time, united with these people—our brothers and sisters in Christ—to serve God; to serve him by proclaiming the gospel to one another to make our joy complete; to serve God by proclaiming the gospel to those who don't yet know so that their joy may be complete and our joy may be made complete. This is Christian joy. It is not, "What's in it for me?" But it is, "How can I connect you to Christ? How can I get you to see what Christ has done for you that brings so much joy to me, I want you to have it."—that Christ-like love that puts the interest of others ahead of our own.

As each of us faces difficulty and trouble and grief and sorrow, as the body of Christ, we say to each other not just "hang in there, things will get better"—but we can remind one another that God loves you. God has died for you and he will not desert you now. We can be the arms and hands and voice of Jesus Christ and reach out and share the love with one another so that everyone's joy is made complete.

That is why God has made us to be a part of his body.