

Pentecost 19 C

Twice we hear it in these parables, that there is joy in heaven over every single sinner who repents, that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God when the one who was lost is found.

There is joy in heaven.

Joy, many have observed, is a thing more wondrous and complicated than happiness.

Happiness seems situational; a happy life, with fewer tragedies than average, often (not always) makes for a happy person.

We are able, most of the time, to be happy when things are going well.

But as we know, things are not always going well.

Terrorists attack, nations go to war, seasons of fear and distrust descend.

Jobs are lost, people get sick, terrible accidents happen.

The times in which we live may not be happy, and our personal happiness may suffer as events near and quite close impinge upon us.

Here joy comes in, because joy does not depend on context and events.

And joy incorporates even tragedy into its reality.

Jesus lived his life with the knowledge that a traumatic death awaited him, in persistent conflict with those who questioned him.

He knew that suffering and tragedy were real; welcomed those in great need and offered them healing.

Yet he also lived in joy, feasting with those he loved, showing them the richer life of the kingdom of God, telling stories and hanging out with children.

He was a man of joy, even as he faced the reality of suffering and death, his and that of the world around him.

We might say that joy is something God means to give us that we can decide to have.

Joy is available in the universe, though sometimes we must pierce through the gloom to find it.

Indeed, we may have to fight dark forces to claim our joy and we may enlist many kinds of help.

If we face depression, good practices and care may put the terrible feeling to flight.

If we fall into a more ordinary funk, taking care with our minds can make a great difference.

What do we put into our minds?

Only the run of tragic and terrible events?

Or do we have eyes to see all the gracious goodness present in our world?

And the tragic and terrible events?

A well-formed follower of Jesus will see them both and still feel the joy and wonder of the world we have been given.

It is the cross of Christ that trains us to do so.

If we can look on his death in suffering love and simultaneously see beauty and tragedy;

Horror and hope;

Pain and glory,

We will begin to see the world as it is.

Suffering, undeservedly, dying, innocently, sharing in the passion its Creator chose to share in with it.

And there is the deepest cause of joy, that God so loves a world that often has not loved God back.

That God promises to draw such a world to Godself in love, to mend its tears, bind its wounds, and restore its wholeness.

Parallel to this world is the joyful world, the one really full of joy, that reflects God's loving perfect will.

It is unseen most of the time but sometimes shines through.

There is joy in heaven over every single sinner who repents, that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God when the one who was lost is found.

There is joy in heaven.

In that kingdom, none of the lost are forgotten, no need is unnoticed, every gracious movement and moment are celebrated.

We hope for this world to be evermore like that one, as hints of the kingdom's joy shine through the ministry of the people of God.

As we realize the joy of being found and the joy of witnessing the discovery of others.

The formation ministries we begin this Sunday are meant to give us the gift of such joy, of seeing and yet hoping,

Of lamenting and yet celebrating,

Of being a people who belong to crucified and risen savior, the man of joy who means to bring us to the fullness of joy in the fullness of time.