

“Joy”

Genesis 43:15-31; 1 John 1:1-4;
John 15:5-14

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Pastor Norman Fowler
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

It is good to be back. I wondered when I came back what it would be like to stand up here. I got one chance to practice that a couple of weeks ago, but now I am back fully, you might say. And it is good to be back.

You may wonder why I picked the story of Joseph for one of the readings today. Joseph, if you remember the story, was sent away by his brothers because they were so jealous of him. They chose not to kill him, but instead sent him away and he ended up as a slave in Egypt, experiencing many tribulations. Through his ability to interpret dreams, he ends up as the one who keeps track of all of Pharaohs' lands—his administrator. So when Joseph's brothers come to Egypt, they don't recognize him but he recognizes them. Even here you can hear there is testing going on. He tests them to find out if their intentions have changed, whether they have continued down the same track they began or whether they repented and became someone else. In the process, he forces them to bring his younger brother down so he can see him. Now we are at the point where Joseph has realized that his family is there and he can hardly contain his joy. He wants to weep with joy and he has to quickly leave so that it's not noticed. He's not ready yet to reveal himself. But the story is full of joy. At the end, Joseph is full of joy at the reunion he has with his brothers.

Now, when I went away, it wasn't because you were sending me off into slavery. You actually were encouraging me to do something that would help enliven me and that would bring renewal to my faith and to my ministry. That has been true. It has been a wonderful journey. Still, in returning there is a bit of adjustment. That's what we see when Joseph encounters his brothers. There's a period of adjustment. I was very thankful when I got back on August 4th that I had a little time to do some adjustment myself before I began to do this work again. You had to adjust to Pastor Scott and some of the changes there, and now you're going to readjust to having me back. There is adjustment that goes on, but there is also joy.—the joy of reunion, the joy of being with family again.

When I was traveling, I saw that joy several times. At L'Abri, there was a man named Chris who had come from South Africa. He had been to L'Abri before and there were people he had met before, and he had the joy of seeing them again and entering into that moment of community again. There was a man named Terry, an older gentleman that we learned to really enjoy and became friends with. He came back to Northumbria at the same time we arrived, and we could see the joy that he had at encountering a place that had fed him and encouraged him through the ups and downs of his life. There was that incredible joy in the reunion.

Last week when we were at my daughter's wedding, there was the incredible joy of going to a place we had lived, and being with people again who we had spent significant

periods of our lives with and who we loved dearly, and to recognize some expression of that love in a way that we probably wouldn't have done on a daily basis. So often when we live daily together we start taking it for granted that we're there with each other. It's those moments when we have those reunions, remembering, when we are struck with how wonderful it is to have these relationships.

I noticed that our new son-in-law, Chris, had some friends from high school who came. They made the effort to come all the way from Virginia to a little town in Colorado just for the wedding. They made the effort to be together, to have that reunion, to know the joy of celebrating together.

As I think about those reunions and the joy and love that is shared, I think about what Christ called us to do: to "love one another just as I have loved you." I see in those reunions that love shared. It made me begin to think about how, in some ways we do that much more often than we realize. Every Sunday when we come to church, it's like a little reunion. We get to be with our family of faith. We get to share that love again. Fellowship is wonderful in all kinds of different ways, but this is a fellowship that's not just a fellowship of similar interests, or a casual gathering. We know that we come because the whole of our fellowship is undergirded by the very love of God in Jesus Christ. We get to come and share this time together and know that our fellowship—as it says in 1 John—our fellowship together, our expression of that love, is a fellowship with the Father and the Son. It is a fellowship that is undergirded by the love of Christ.

The wonderful thing is that not only are we invited to do this, Jesus gives us a command to love one another as I have loved you. When we gather together, we recognize that gift of love; we allow that gift to be evident for us. In 1st John, as he invited those folks to be in that fellowship, he says that his joy will be complete when they are in that kind of fellowship. When Jesus talks about it, he says *your* joy will be complete when you love one another.

For me this is a special Sunday morning because I'm coming back from a longer journey, but it made me think about how coming here on a Sunday morning reminds me of the love we share, the joy of reunion, and the joy of being together. Every Sunday morning we experience in some way that moment of joy when we recognize the love of God shared, the fellowship we have with each other and with the Father and the Son.

It is those reunions, those moments of joy, the recognition that we get to share God's love, that gives me some lift for going into the new week. Then, part way through the week I begin to look forward again to the next time we get to have a reunion together to share in the joy of the love of God. It's wonderful to be back. Amen.