



TOUCH POINT

## The Way to Complete Joy – Touchpoint for May 1, 2024

### John 15:9-17 (NRSVUE) As the Father Has Loved Me

<sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

<sup>12</sup>"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>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 that I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. <sup>17</sup>I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

### **Peace to you in the name of the Mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.**

Jesus was pouring Divine Identity into the minds and hearts of a people whose identity was found in their journey of suffering and enslavement. Some found their identity in aligning with the powerful; no matter how depraved, they went along to get along. Many were simply lost, all of them abandoning their fake identities and following the way of Jesus. But how would they do it when their leader is gone? It would be by following his instructions, no matter the onslaught of temptation to follow another enslaving way. The Wild Goose community would call it the Way of Freedom from Addiction.

Jesus was also addressing a people who understood the honor that is conferred if one is considered a servant or friend of a king. In the same way, it is noble to be identified as a servant of God. It was an honor for King David and then for the apostle, Paul. But Jesus is saying whether you've been called out of slavery or honored as a servant, "I no longer call you slaves... I call you friends." Friends of the king.

As a basis for understanding this phenomenal invitation to Divine friendship, and away from all forms of enslavement, I want to briefly revisit the pattern of Belonging, Believing and Behaving. It is important because the order is typically reversed in evangelism. One must change the way he or she is behaving, say a prayer to choose Jesus and then, and only then, will you belong. It is belonging by membership.

The pattern of Behave, Believe, Belong focuses on a person's behavior. Belong, Believe, Behave centers on God's behavior.

In these passages God commands. God calls. God appoints. God loves.

As we read through the text, did you notice how this phrase stood out?

*"...if you do what I command you..."*

The tone can't be ignored, and the words may stand out among the other words of love, friendship, and joy. It's understandable, because the refrains of past teachings associated with a punitive and authoritative God keep playing in our memories. Under this interpretation, God is watching with high expectations to see if we're still his friends. I gave that up a long time ago because I'm a rotten friend to God under that scenario.

Perhaps this directive from Jesus is wisdom coming from a king, God as father to him that has kept him safe. When he rejected the devil's lure, Jesus fought it off by keeping the Father's commands... instructions that helped preserve Jesus when he felt abandoned. In other words, Jesus is saying when you do what I did under pressure from others, you are one in my friendship. *Do this in remembrance of me.* Maybe loving one another is as sacred an act as communion. Do this, Jesus commands, because we are friends.

If we pay attention to the whole of the message in John, the invitation moves us away from our behavior and focuses more on God's actions. Ours is purely a call to respond.

For instance, "You did not choose me, I chose you."

Wait, are you kidding me?!

"No, no, no, I chose God," we say. "I sing, 'Jesus Take the Wheel.' I asked God to come into my life! I did it! This is heretical!"

Yes, it is! It is heresy against a false god we've created or has claimed power over us. A god who is now being bumped off its throne.

What I'm reading in these passages is that we all were chosen.

But what are we chosen for?

### **1. For Love.**

Both a welcoming love, *agapao*, and a state of love, *agape*.

*Agapao*, this incredible openhearted, welcoming love, goes all different directions in this text. Jesus to the Father. The Father to Jesus, Jesus to us, and us to Jesus. And finally, a radical welcoming love, one to another.

*Agape*, this pure and unconditional accepting love, is characteristic of God only. We are in this love as a state of our belonging. We can *agapao* God's *agape*. Welcome the truth of the eternal and intrinsic love of God. It's *agape* love we live in, and abide in. This state of *agape* gives us the capacity to act in *agapao* love toward others.

### **2. For Joy.**

Jesus chose the hardest way. This way of life recognizes there are stretches of unhappiness and disappointment. But the hallmark of a true follower of Jesus is joy. This joy is made complete in those who offer joy. "I have spoken these things that my joy would be in you and that your joy will be made complete."

I'm sorry to bust the gloomy faces cherished by anal, rule following Pharisees, but this stuff is amazing! Joy is one of the purposes of living in The Way. I feel like Sally Fields in front of an adoring Academy Awards audience as she said, "You like me, you really like me!" Yes! This is one of the hints that God not only loves us, but also likes us! It appears God isn't settling for offering the undependable state of happiness, God is offering the eternal state of joy. Joy confounds circumstances and conditions, where happy is dependent on them.

### **3. For friendship.**

In a good sense, Paul, and others were proud of being called servants to a loving God. As I said, there was an honor that came with being considered a servant of God. An invitation to be no longer a slave, but a friend, is amazing. To participate in God's Divine nature by welcoming others in love, and to abide in this love, is what a friend of God does. A friend of God does not judge life by behaviors, but by the intrinsic nature of belonging. Jesus said he calls us friends because we know too much! We are insiders on the situation. There is a massive love conspiracy on our behalf, only we are commanded to reveal it to others.

Friends feel safe in each other's homes. We can be together without talking. We observe the absurdity of life together and have a good laugh. I don't know about you, but I'll take that invitation from God any day! The implications are profound; doing your work, writing this message, people getting medical treatments etc., with God as friend.

A friend meets intentionally and does not fear rejection or disappointment.

So, what about this direct command to follow the commandments? This is the Behave part. It's not a prerequisite to belonging, but it sees belonging as a state of being in the oneness of Christ. Our behavior is a response to God's invitation to love, joy and Divine friendship. If we focus on commandment management as a prerequisite, we will miss the joy. If however, we abide in the truth of our declared identity, participate in reciprocal joy and friendship, we will find ourselves sinning less and loving more.

How to we begin this incredible path of joy, friendship, and welcoming love?

First step: Don't try, abide. Abide in the *agape* state of being loved.

In the '80s I used to go to a men's Bible study led by Larry Wright, a former '70s Top 40 DJ known as Lucky Lawrence. He shared how through all his partying as a radio personality, his distraught wife asked her women's prayer group to pray for Larry to change. They prayed every week for quite some time. Well, they gave up; he was pretty bad. The group suggested that perhaps instead of praying for a change in Larry, they might pray for Larry's wife. Suddenly, things began to change. As she prayed for herself, her understanding of God's love for her became a radical love for her Larry. Larry attributed his transformation to being radically loved by her. He had never been loved this way.

That became his story, until his devoted daughter brought home a guy with tattoos and piercings. Larry refused to let him in. She said, "Dad, this is my husband." He let him in the door but never accepted him. He just asked the Bible study he led to pray for him. One day Larry realized he was a being a hypocrite, and that he would lose his daughter if he didn't change. He chose radical *agapao* love. Just as his wife did for him, Larry chose his son-in-law over his own pride. Larry implemented this welcoming love, and his son-in-law eventually became his best bud. His son-in-law said he had never been welcomed by anyone like this. Both had unresolved father issues healed through reciprocal love, friendship, and joy. We may not always feel it, but that's when the commands must be remembered.

As a side note, this is not for those living in emotional or physical abuse. Sometimes, to stay is just another form of enslavement. To allow abuse is not radical love. Radical love is following the command to love yourself.

Jesus provided the greatest command for living a life of joy, friendship, and love. He basically said, 'I am welcoming you to abide in the *agape* (love of God). Bask in it and breathe it in. Be in awe of it then welcome (*agapao*) others. Do this as you are abiding.'

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." – Luke 10:27

Why did Jesus command these things?

Jesus closes with, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

**Amen.**

## Opening Songs

### **Be Still**

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

### **Calm Me, Lord**

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.  
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.  
Let all the tumult within me cease.  
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

### **Bible Passage**

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

### **Touchpoint**

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### **Come Drink of Living Water**

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Come drink of living water. Never thirst again.

### **The Meal**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

(Monastery Choir of St. John of San Francisco)

### **Benediction**

### **The Lord Bless You and Keep You**

(National Lutheran Choir, feat. Peter C. Lutkin)

The Lord bless you and keep you.  
The Lord lift his countenance upon you... And give you peace...  
The Lord make his face to shine upon you... And be gracious unto you...  
The Lord be gracious unto you. Amen.