

SERMON SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST/ FRUITS OF JOY

“Joy in the morning” based on Luke 15:1-10 and Gal 5:22-26

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“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?”

Jesus begins his teaching through parable with what sounds like a rhetorical question. His listeners may well have been wondering, *where is He going with this?* What do sheep have to do with God, faith, or their relationship with God?

And then Jesus explains, *“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”*

Oh! Sheep symbolize human. At that moment, the point becomes clear. Jesus is not simply telling a story about shepherds and sheep. He is revealing the heart of God. The shepherd searching for the lost sheep is a picture of God's relentless love—God who does not give up on those who have wandered away, but seeks them until they are found.

I personally have no idea how close the relationship between a sheep and their shepherd in real life is, because I was born and grew up in a city, far from any farming area. But from what I have heard and read, the relationship between a sheep and their shepherd is one of the closest possible between human and animals, containing trust, care, and recognition of one another. In the ancient Middle East, a shepherd spent immense time with the flock, resulting in a bond where the sheep intimately recognized the shepherd's unique voice.

The Bible often describes the close relationship between a shepherd and the sheep. In John 10, Jesus tells us that the sheep know the shepherd's voice and follow him. In

return, the shepherd protects the flock and is even willing to lay down his life for the sheep. As they spent a lot of time together, that losing one sheep might feel like losing their own children. It is no surprise, then, that in today's reading, when the shepherd finds the one sheep that was lost, he is filled with joy. He calls his friends and neighbours together to rejoice and celebrate. When the lost being found, it worth a celebration!

Celebration.

Now, I would like to invite you to think and try to remember when was the last time you celebrated something? Perhaps you are thinking of a birthday, an anniversary, a graduation, or another special occasion that made you think it's worth of celebration where you invited family and friends.

Now think a little deeper. Why did you celebrate? Why are we celebrating particular thing in life?

I cannot ask each one of you, but if I did, many of you might say, "I celebrate because I was happy and joyful and I would like to share that joy to people that is important in my life" Perhaps you reached a long-awaited goal, experienced an unexpected blessing, or simply witnessed something in your life that was worth celebrating.

And that is exactly what the shepherd in our Gospel reading experienced. He celebrated because what had been lost was found. The sheep that he knows by name, that wandered for some time, finally be found, alive.

Friends in Christ, in our life sometimes we mistake the occasion as the reason for our celebration. Take birthdays, for example. We are not merely celebrating another date on the calendar. We celebrate because we are grateful that God has given us another year of life—another year of His faithfulness, another year of blessings,

challenges, growth, and grace. So out of that gratitude, we naturally want to share our joy with the people we love.

And deep down, every one of us longs for joy. We all want lives marked by happiness and fulfillment. The question is not whether we desire it, but where we look for it.

The ancient philosopher Aristotle described happiness as the *summum bonum*—the highest good or ultimate goal of human life. He believed that people pursue what they pursue and love what they love because they think those things will make them happy. Whether it is success, relationships, wealth, recognition, or achievement, much of what we do is driven by the hope that it will bring us happiness.

Yet our Gospel invites us to think more deeply today. In everyday conversation, we often use the words *happiness* and *joy* as though they mean the same thing, but there is an important difference. One writer puts it this way: "Happiness is an emotion, while joy is a state of mind." Happiness often depends on our circumstances and can come and go. Joy, however, is deeper. It can remain even when life is difficult because it is rooted in something far more lasting.

As a child, I don't think I knew the difference between the two. I got an ice cream, I feel happy! My mom came home after she was out a whole day, I feel joyful, I passed the exam at school, I feel happy and joyful. It seems like these two not have a very different meaning.

However, growing up, I know some people make distinction between the two. And over the years, I have learned that happiness is linked to particular circumstances. We are happy when things go well. When the state of Joy is used to describe something deeper, stronger, and less circumstantial. And as we continue listening to

Jesus' parable, we discover that the joy He speaks about is not simply the happiness of finding a lost sheep. It is the joy of God's heart when those who are lost are found.

One situation as I shared earlier in Children time, the moment when I graduated from my school in Vancouver, I felt happy and joyful. I finished my degree in North American school when I need to function not in my mother tongue is enough to make me super happy. And the privilege of having my parents come from Indonesia is make me feel beyond happy. But, two weeks after the graduation, my parents needed to go back to Indonesia, I needed to go back to work. And the happiness slowly faded.

However, I can tell you that the joy remains. The joy of make my parents proud, the joy of working hard and accomplishing a goal. The joy that at the end I overcame all the challenges, studied full time in language that I wasn't familiar with at first, while worked part time and also doing ministries in different churches. The joy in knowing God has been beside me the whole journey is what I can still feel long after the graduation day.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, last week I mentioned that love, the first fruits of the spirit is a choice and a command. And today, through the readings we can see that joy is also a choice—something we are to go after and as an attitude we are to cultivate.

In Galatians 5, joy is included as the second fruit of the Spirit— depiction joy as a fruit here means it something that should grow out of our life, just as clearly as apples grow on an apple tree. Apostle Paul in one of his letter wrote, "God is joy and God wants us to be joyful." Which means we are commanded to be joyful (Philippians 4:4). The joyful God of heaven wants us to be joyful.

And we want to be joyful, right? But we know it's not always easy. And if we are honest, human tend to look for joy or happiness in the wrong places. Some people

try to find it through alcohol, drugs, money, or power. But we know all of these are temporary. None of them bring us a true joy and happiness that last forever. It just like a band aid that cover whatever wound we are having.

Sometimes, we even fool ourselves into thinking we will find happiness and joy in putting our own interests first. But real joy actually makes us more and more selfless. Being selfless here can mean placing other first, helping them, care for them. And it eventually brings great joy, meaning and purpose in our life.

With that understanding, it becomes possible to feel joy even though the circumstances aren't happy. It's possible to feel joy even though we don't own as much as other people. It's possible to feel joy even when life doesn't go according to our plans. We can feel joy even when circumstances are not ideal and even when we are suffering, challenged, or uncomfortable.

If you are wondering, how can I feel joy in the midst of suffering? Charles Spurgeon, a theologian and preacher said, "believers are not dependent upon circumstances. Their joy comes not from what they have but from what they are, not from where they are but from who's they are, not from what they enjoy but from what was suffered for them by their Lord."

Friends, everyone longs for joy. As Christians, we know that lasting joy is found in Jesus Christ alone. Last week, we reflected on love, the first fruit of the Spirit. Today, we have considered joy, the second sweet fruit that the Holy Spirit seeks to grow within us.

The word *joy* appears nearly 200 times in Scripture, reminding us how important this fruit is in the life of faith. So the question before us is this: Where will we seek joy? Will we continue to look for it in places that cannot truly satisfy? Will we put ourselves first? Will we allow our circumstances to determine whether we can

rejoice? Or will we find our joy in the Lord, trusting in God's presence and promises through every season of life?

Perhaps today you do not feel joyful. Perhaps you are carrying grief, worry, disappointment, or uncertainty. If that is where you are, hold on to God's promises. Just as there is light at the end of the tunnel, God has not abandoned you. The God who knows your sorrows, heartaches, and fears is the same God who walks beside you and promises a joy that no circumstance can take away.

So let us rejoice in the Lord. Not because life is always easy, but because God is faithful. God desires for us a life filled with hope, purpose, and joy. May the Holy Spirit continue to grow this fruit within us, so that our lives may reflect the joy of Christ to a world that desperately needs it.

Amen.