

2 JOHN 12-13

(Readings: John 3:22-36; Luke 5:27-39)

Learn To Live!

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

There is something limiting about being apart from someone. And this is especially so if you have had a close relationship. We find we miss them a lot, and we try to keep in touch. But relationships are hard from a distance.

Didn't we find that out when we were younger? Having a boyfriend or girlfriend who lived far away, or who was even away for a couple of days, was hard.

Perhaps right now that's the case for you. For whatever reason your loved one is far away. And you miss them.

There is something to being together which we can't quite describe in words. We really need to be there, right there with them, and then you have the language which words just can't describe. That's when you have the closest bond. No amount of words - written or spoken over the telephone - can make up for actually being together.

Don't all the love poems and prose over the centuries prove this point? Going right back to Solomon's love poem, 'The Song of Songs' in the Bible, and even back to creation itself, when God gave a suitable helper for Adam so that he wasn't alone, there's that desperate longing to being together.

There is something special, something connecting, about being together. And that could not be truer than when it's believers joining together. There you have a real unity.

This is what Ecclesiastes chapter 4 shows. There the verses 9 and 10 describe the strength that two friends have: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" And in verse 12 the conclusion is drawn: "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves."

But then Solomon there draws the next logical step, "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." If two are strong how much stronger aren't three? And for Solomon that third person is the strongest friend any friend could be. Because how much better isn't it then if the third person is the Lord? As Jesus says in Matthew 18 verse 20 where we are together in his name, gathered as believers following his will, he promises us that he is there too.

In this way we come to the first aspect to our text this afternoon. You see, WE LEARN TO LIVE BECAUSE HE IS ALIVE!

While the apostle John has just been warning the churches about those who would spoil their fellowship with the Lord, he's writing that because of how

precious that fellowship is to him. I mean, he can't wait to be in that communion with them! Look at what he writes in verse 12, "I have much to write to you."

Why else would he write that if he didn't actually mean it? He was referring to a personal connection. He wasn't someone from far away, closed off in some ivory tower - he was their friend, the one they trusted, because he had been there with them.

When John says, "I hope to come to you," it's no nice phrase, which means nothing. It's not like saying that everyday greeting, "How are you?" The last thing the person saying that usually wants to hear is anything about how well you are! It's just another way of saying "Hello".

But John really wants to be there. As he goes on to say, he wants to "talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete." Mind you, he is already there with them. In spirit, that is.

This reminds us of where our fellowship all comes from in the first place. For if the fellowship between believers is so vital, then isn't it that because of the fellowship we have with Jesus Christ first of all?

Otherwise why else would we want to be together now? There would be heaps of other places we'd rather naturally be!

And perhaps if that's what you're thinking now - of a place you much rather prefer to be - then you need to truly see! You see, if it is the Spirit of Christ upon our hearts we do want to be here now. The Spirit is the reason why we are here now - and the Spirit will be the blessing we have when we go from here.

Now, imagine if John had written, "I'm going to write a lot to you now, because that way I'll save my time later and we won't have any of the hassles of having to get together"? Boy, we wouldn't be impressed. "You can forget about writing at all then!" we'd rightly reply. "And don't bother coming around here anytime - if that's the way you feel!"

Why have friends or family if we don't want to visit them - and they us? An unwelcome stranger, a spiritual trespasser, like the apostle speaks about in verse 10, that's different. Though it may sometimes be hard, we can turn them down. Our conscience would be clear about that.

But not with family. We owe them a duty. We can't always understand why, but somehow that's part of what being a family is all about.

This is shown by the strong emotions expressed when families are ripped apart or reunite after many years apart. How much aren't parents in anguish when a child goes missing or is taken away?

Perhaps you've read about those children who were separated from their parents during the Second World War. The authorities believed that their parents were not capable of looking after their young children, and so those children were sent on ships out to places like Western Australia. There they were brought up in orphanages or placed with families.

Years later, under the Freedom of Information Act, those children were able to find out that some of their parents were still alive, and that they had brothers and sisters and nephews and nieces in England. What emotion-

charged moments they were when they were reunited! Something had been missing – and now it was found!

In this way we come to the second aspect to the text. This tells us that now ...
WE LEARN TO LIVE BY HAVING HIS JOY!

There is something about family alright. 'Blood is thicker than water.' But this is still an inadequate illustration. This shows us a physical and emotional family bond, but it's not spiritual. And while it is very precious in this life, it means nothing in the next life.

You know, we can forget that. We can think that our friends and family in this life we'll have in the next life. And while we may recognise them there, what we are told by the Lord is that what matters then will be something quite different.

You see, what will take up the whole of paradise restored will be precisely this "joy" John writes about here in verse 12. As C.S. Lewis described it, "Joy is the serious business of heaven." This is the word *kara* in the original Greek – the word verse 12 concludes with in our text.

This joy is what we will have by being with the Lord Jesus. And it is a joy which John says we actually already have now by faith in him. In fact, John talks about this joy as being fulfilled now, because we have met Jesus.

It is like another John - John the Baptist - said when he was asked about Jesus. In John 3 verse 29 he said, "The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete."

So when John talks about meeting them "face to face, so that our joy may be complete" he is referring to this joy of meeting Christ which we have in Christian fellowship. This is like being with Jesus himself. Just as much as John the Baptist could say, "That joy is now mine, and it is complete," so can we.

This does not mean the joy itself is complete but you rejoice because its object has appeared. Just like when the bridegroom has arrived at that crucial stage of the wedding celebrations so you rejoice that Jesus is here.

You might remember when Jesus was asked why his disciples were different than the followers of the other religious groups of the time. This was the question that was asked, as Luke 5 verses 33 and 34 records: "John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking." And our Lord showed what *kara* is with his answer: "Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them?"

Congregation, how much truer isn't this after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Now we definitely have the peace beyond understanding! When Jesus said in John 14 verse 27, "Peace I leave with you - my peace I give you; I do not give you as the world gives; do not let your hearts be troubled and don't be afraid," he meant this joy.

And so it is that we come to the third aspect of our text. Here we see **WE LEARN TO LIVE THROUGH ONE ANOTHER.**

The fact that this joy is gained by keeping the commandments doesn't mean that what we do saves us. It does mean that we love to live this way because it's the Lord's way. In our hearts we know there can't be any other way because Jesus Christ is the Life – the only life to live!

So while you might hear people say today, "Ah - get a life!", they only mean they don't like the life you live and just want to get on with their own selfish lives. Think about that the next time you hear someone use that phrase. You'll notice that they're not really open to change at all - they're more avoiding anyone different.

So, what an opportunity that is for witness. You can challenge them. Say to them, "Yea, but what about THE LIFE?"

Of course, it helps if we are showing Christ's Life. The more we do that the more we'll get responses like, "Ah - get a life!" Because they will react to how we are.

You see, when you believe that it's only in Jesus that you're right with God; as you grow in realising that he is all you need; and the more you live like you and him are going to be together forever, then others can't help but notice. And they might not be so happy about that!

It is this getting the true life which starts at home - the spiritual home. This is why John in his gospel uniquely recorded words of Jesus to his disciples – words that through them come to us all in the Church. These are the words of John 13, verses 34 and 35: "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."

This is certainly what the early church was known for. In the words of one Roman historian, Statius Caecilius, "They know one another by secret marks and signs, and they love one another almost before they know one another."

So when John ends his letter, "The children of your chosen sister send their greetings," he means it. They know that from his own example – he is the apostle known as 'The Apostle of Love'.

There is a story told about John in his final years by Jerome, an early Church Father. The apostle had become so infirm he had to be carried into the church service. There, each Sunday, he is placed in the middle of the people. They wait reverently until he speaks. And what he speaks are just the same few words each time, "Little children, love one another."

John's point is that if we can't do this, we certainly cannot go on to do anything else! I mean, how is the Lord able to show his love to those outside the church, by converting them and bringing them in, if those who are meant to do it for him - we his ambassadors already inside the church - cannot do it among ourselves?

Yet once it is already alive in us we'll be ready for others too. You see, that attitude of wanting others to share his joy cannot help but beam out. Like the song goes, "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life!*" *That's what Jesus said. Without the Way there is no going, Without the Truth there is no knowing; Without the Life there is no living. I am the Way, the Truth and The Life! That's what Jesus said.*"

You learn to really live when Jesus Christ so fills your life that he is wherever you are going. You learn to really live when he is what's growing in you by your knowing. And you show that you are learning as he is seen in all your living.

Verse 13 confirms what John has already said in verse 12. In his greeting there he brings home the closest of all family connections. Because this is the family of faith! And that's what we see in the expression "the children of your elect sister".

We are helped to understand this when we go back to verse 1. We read there the title "the chosen lady". This we saw as a reference to the Church herself.

If we take this expression in verse 13 also figuratively then the word "sister" stands for Church. Thus John writes here as one of the children – a member – of the Church. This means it is likely that the congregation where John was then a member passes their greetings on to the other churches. And they would have known where John was. Just as they were likely to know others there in that congregation.

Isn't that what we find in the Christian community? When you visit a church it's not long and you find links to people you know – even to you yourself.

So this is about family. It is the most precious family. And where a family prays together doesn't it stay together?

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Loving Lord Jesus, how we rejoice to be part of your chosen and precious! What joy we have in knowing you and then in realising the difference that makes in our lives. We know where we're going – and who is bringing us there.

We look forward to the day when that joy will be complete. Then we will be with you for all eternity. And so with the early New Testament Church we cry out, 'Maranatha! 'Come, Lord Jesus! 'Come quickly!'

Amen.