

John 15:1-17 Spiritual Intimacy

Tim Anderson 16/9/18

You may not have noticed,
but there is an epidemic of anxiety
amongst the young people in our community.
I was talking to a woman last week.
She does Christian ministry amongst female university students.
She told me that when she meets up with students now days,
she doesn't ask them whether they have ever contemplated suicide.
She asks them how often they contemplate suicide.
That strikes me as a seismic shift from when I was a university student.
People at that time were far less anxious about life.
What's changed?

Well the woman I was speaking to
was doing a workshop at the Anglican Future Conference.
And she asked the group at the workshop to try to pinpoint the reason
why young people are so anxious.
Here's the sense of what was said.
Young people today are told that they have limitless potential.
"You reach for your dream and you can touch the sky."
That kind of stuff.
But there's a problem with having limitless potential.
The problem is that it's limitless.
If you have limitless potential then by definition,
you can never achieve your potential.
There's always something more you could have achieved.
Got the latest iphone?
Don't worry there will be a new one out next year
to make you feel like yours is out of date.
Got a good job that puts food on the table?

But you should be working harder and longer.
Reach for the sky and grab that promotion.
Are you keeping yourself pretty fit down at the gym?
Yeah but you haven't got half as good a body
as some of your friends on instagram.
If you just put in another couple of sessions a week,
and cut down the carbs in your diet,
you might be able to post some pictures with a totally flat belly.
Just ask me, I know all about it.
I had a great conversation with Orielle this week.
"Daddy, your tummy is round".
"Yes Ori, but your tummy is round too."
"Yes but Daddy, your tummy is round in both directions."
"Yes Ori, that's called a sphere,
yours is more like a disk.
But they are both round, aren't they?"
Well instagram puts another piece in the puzzle of anxiety.
Young people are told they have limitless potential
which can never be achieved by definition.
And then they are glued to their screens
where all their friends are posting perfect pictures
about their perfect imaginary lives.
Little wonder at all the angst.

Well Jesus must have anticipated the angst.
In verse 11 of today's reading he says,
"I have told you this so that my joy may be in you
and that your joy may be complete."
Well isn't that a lovely picture?
To have the joy of God living inside of you.
Do you know the joy you experience when you cuddle a little baby?
How much more when it is your own little baby.

Do you know the joy you experience when you see a beautiful sunset or powerful waves breaking on the beach, or a favourite in our house at the moment, play with a cute little bunny rabbit?

Well Jesus has the joy of every single newborn baby in the world. Jesus created the sunset and the powerful waves and the bunny rabbit. What would it mean to have his joy inside of you?

It would mean that your joy is complete.

There's something anxiety producing about limitless potential.

You can never achieve it.

Jesus says your joy can be complete.

That's like having the full set.

You don't need any more.

Jesus will make your joy complete.

Sounds good, right.

But how?

How can I get Jesus to make my joy complete?

The key is being intimately connected to him.

The picture Jesus uses is the vine and its branches.

And we see that picture on the Mornington Peninsula.

Vineyards in winter where the vine is pruned back.

Then come summer there are branches of the vine trained along wires for fruiting.

Jesus says he is like the pruned back vine we see in winter.

And we are like the branches that grow out from the vine.

And the key to survival if you're a branch is to stay connected to the vine.

We've all seen what happens to the branches that get pruned off.

They drop on the ground and become lifeless twigs in no time.

They certainly aren't going to bear any fruit.

They have nothing of the life of the vine flowing through them.

But the branches that stay connected to the vine can be laden with fruit.

To be laden with fruit is a lovely sounding picture.
It speaks of a life that is achieving worthwhile stuff.
Not wasting your time,
but actually getting somewhere important.

But what does it mean to stay connected to Jesus?

In verse 4, Jesus says,

"Remain in me,

as I also remain in you.

No branch can bear fruit by itself;

it must remain in the vine.

Neither can you bear fruit

unless you remain in me."

There is deep joy,

complete joy from being intimately connected with Jesus.

Being intimately connected with Jesus

and staying intimately connected with Jesus.

That's where we find true joy.

How can we get and stay intimately connected to Jesus?

The surprising answer that Jesus gives is to keep his commands.

We think about intimate connection

as something that might involve romance, a candlelit dinner,

a walk on the beach looking at the sunset.

In verses 9-10, Jesus says,

"As the Father has loved me,

so have I loved you.

Now remain in my love.

If you keep my commands,

you will remain in my love,

just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."
It sounds very transactional for an intimate and loving connection.
'Keep my commands.'

In my mind
that brings up pictures of doing the dishes and taking out the rubbish bins.
About as far removed from romance, candlelit dinners
and walks on the beach as you could get.

But what actually is Jesus' command?

He tells us in verse 12,

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you."

Do you start to get the picture of why keeping Jesus' commands,
is not a joyless legalism,
but is actually the path to fullness of joy?

Imagine what it would look like if we were able to love one another
in the same way that Jesus has loved us?

How did Jesus express his love for us?

The greatest expression of Jesus' love was still in the future
when he spoke the words in John 15 to his disciples.

But he points them forward to it in verse 13.

"Greater love has no one than this:
to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Within 12 hours of speaking those words,
Jesus would be doing exactly that.

Laying down his life for his friends.

The Roman Governor Pontius Pilate had Jesus crucified.
Nailed to a cross with a criminal on either side of him.

In what sense did Jesus do that for his friends?

You see, Jesus went to the cross willingly.

If he wanted to, he had power to walk free.

He could have just gone on his way.
He could have called down angels from heaven to rescue him.
But he didn't.
He chose the path of crucifixion.
Why did he do that?
Well he did it for his friends.
He did it for us.

Our brokenness was destroying our friendship with God.
In our Bible passage, Jesus says,
"My command is this: Love each other".
We all know we fail at that.
Sometimes we manage to love a limited number of people
in a limited way.
But even the people we love best,
we still manage to hurt their feelings,
to ignore them when they need attention,
to be brisk with them when they need patience,
to be indulgent with them when they need exhortation.
We don't measure up to the command: "Love each other."
I mean look at the world.
Is this planet really a shining example of people loving each other?
Can you look at Syria?
Can you look at the children abducted in child slavery?
Can you look at the opulent wealth of the few,
while many starve,
and then look God in the eye and say,
"Yes we love each other."
I'm sorry we can't do that.
And we all know that each of us individually is part of the problem.

God sent his Son the Lord Jesus.

Jesus lived right.
His actions were the embodiment of love.
But most of all his death was the embodiment of love.
God requires a penalty to be paid for wrongdoing.
And in his great love,
he paid the penalty himself on the cross.
God took on human form,
and said, "I will take on the penalty myself
for all the times that my people have failed to love each other."

And that's what Jesus means when he says,
"Greater love has no one than this:
to lay down one's life for one's friends."
Jesus wasn't pointing forward to Anzac Day.
I mean that's the time in our nation when we hear these words.
And they are pointing to something true.
Those in the armed services who laid down their lives
were expressing great love for us.
But Jesus was going in a different direction.
He was pointing forward to the cross.
The time when he would lay down his life for his friends.
When Jesus laid down his life for his friends,
God looked upon Jesus friends
as people who have loved each other as Jesus loved us.
Not because we had achieved it.
But because God sees Jesus when he looks at us.
If you are Jesus' friend,
when God looks at you,
he sees Jesus.

Well that leaves us with a question.
Are you a friend of Jesus?

Jesus makes great promises to those who are his friends.
Jesus promises that those who are intimately connected with him
will bear much fruit.
Jesus has promised that his joy will be in them
and their joy will be complete.
But is that you?

Jesus' friends are those who keep his commands.
Jesus' command is love each other in the same way he loved us.
That means laying down your life.
That's how Jesus loved.
Do you measure up?
Is that how you love?

If you're honest,
and you know that your love falls short of that standard,
don't despair,
Jesus laid down his life.
He took the penalty himself on the cross.
All the times you have failed to love.
Jesus paid the price.
If you are his friend.

Do you want to be Jesus' friend today?
There will be some people here today,
who have never taken an intentional and conscious decision
to become a friend of Jesus.
In this world of anxiety,
where everyone has limitless potential,
and so no one fulfils their potential,
do you want to have Jesus' joy inside of you?
Do you want your joy to be complete?

Then become a friend of Jesus.

I'm going to say a prayer now.

If you haven't taken a conscious decision in the past
to become a friend of Jesus
and if you would like to do that today,
then I invite you to say this prayer in your heart after me.

Lord Jesus,

I recognise that your command to love each other as I have loved you
is the right command.

I haven't followed that command all the time.

I don't deserve to be called your friend.

But thank you that you don't give us what we deserve.

Thank you that you laid down your life for your friends.

So that God would see your goodness when he looks at me.

Lord Jesus,

I would like to be counted as your friend.

Please help me to remain in your love

like the branches remain in the vine.

Please put your joy in me.

Please enable me to bear much fruit.

If you prayed that prayer,

and it's the first time

you've made a conscious decision to be a friend of Jesus

I would encourage you to tell me about it after the service.

I will be able to help you think about what it means to be a friend of Jesus.