### “Joy Made Complete” Steve Finlan for The First Church, May 12, 2024

**1 John 5:9, 11–13, 19**

9If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son. . . 11This is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. . .

19We know that we are God’s children.

**John 17:6–7, 10–18**

6 “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7Now they know that everything you have given me is from you. . .

10 “All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. . .

15I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. 16They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”

Good morning and Happy Mothers’ Day. It’s so amazing to be appreciated one day out of the year, isn’t it? Really, every day should be Mothers’ Appreciation Day. I’m going to mention mothers again, and it won’t be hard, since love is a central part of today’s message.

Probably what’s central in this part of John’s letter is: “God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11). A by-product of this central fact is the truth that we are God’s children (5:19). Each of us has an earth father and an earth mother, and we have God as our supreme Father. On this day when we honor our earth mothers, we can link that up with our reverence for our supreme Father. We are God’s children, and we are also our moms’ children.

Let’s look at the gospel next. Jesus prays for believers, “that they may be one, as we are one” (John 17:11). The community’s spiritual unity can be a reflection of the Son’s unity with the Father. Unity will be good for them, spiritually. It will lead to harmonious action, healthy communication, shared purpose. When there is unity of purpose and motivation, then the group functions like a healthy family, the family of God.

Jesus asks God to protect the people who have been given to him. He says he *has* protected them, but now he wants God to protect them from the evil one (17:12, 15). He knows there will be suffering, because they do not belong to the world (17:16), and many in the world will not treat them well, but he prays that their hearts remain true, that they not absorb any evil into their hearts. That’s the protection he is most concerned with. He wants them not to be infected by the surrounding evil.

Then he says that he wants his joy to be made complete in them (17:13). What does this interesting focus upon joy mean? First of all, it seems that joy is an essential part of discipleship. He says joy will be *complete* in them. That might mean that joy is *expected* of believers, and he prays that they will experience this, that nothing will stop them from living fully within his joy. They will live in joy, and joy will live in them. It is joy, rather than evil, that should be infectious in this new society that he has created. People will be touched by something in their environment. Let it be good rather than evil.

This could be called the motherly love of Jesus, it is love that considers the emotional climate, that encourages the emotion of joy, which energizes living, both in individuals and in the shared emotional atmosphere in a group.

Finally he prays that they may be sanctified, that is, made holy, in God’s truth. He is about to send them out into the world, just as he himself was sent out. He prays that God’s holiness may surround them as they go. He wants them to be dedicated and principled, and to spread goodness. This spreading of principles and truth seems like fatherly love; so we see Jesus imparting both fatherly and motherly love. The best of human love, the best fatherly and motherly love, is based upon God’s love. God may be far above us, but God does not despise our humanness, our finiteness. God wishes to impart divine qualities to our human lives, so that it may be “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10).

I see another instance of Jesus’ motherly love in John’s letter. He speaks of the love of Jesus that spreads energy and joy. He says “Whoever has the Son has life” (1 John 5:12). The Son is the life-giver, and the joy-giver. In a smaller way, this happens in every woman’s family. She is the life-giver and the joy-giver within the household. The mother is the sunlight in the family. If her joy declines, the light in the family starts to fade. Let us pray for all mothers to keep their light shining, to have the mental health and the spiritual fulfillment that they need. And let each one of us draw upon the true Light of Life, the light that has come into the world (John 1:4, 9). With that light, we can shed light in our families, our extended families, our workplaces, even the broader society in which we live. Son-life is like sunlight, in the way it illuminates what is around it. It sheds fatherly truth and courage and motherly love and joy. Of course, I don’t want to imply that fatherly love has no joy in it, or that motherly love has no truth in it. I’m just finding a slightly different emphasis between mothers and fathers. Fathers can also show love and joy, and mothers can also exhibit courage and truth.

Our Scriptures gave us wonderful topics today: “Whoever has the Son has life . . . We know that we are God’s children.” What delightful good news! If I am a child of God, then I have an enormous family, with millions of people and angels, and others whom I will meet. Trusting that God will light my way, I feel confident his wish will come true, where he said, “They may have my joy made complete in themselves.”