

CAN JOY BE TRAINED?

Sermon for the Sunday Jubilate John 16, 16-23

¹⁶ In a little while you will see me no more; and again a little while, and then you will see me. ¹⁷ Some of his disciples said to one another, What does it mean when he says to us: In a little while you will not see me; and again a little while, then ye shall see me; and: I go to the father? ¹⁸ Then they said, What does it mean that he says: Just a little while longer? We don't know what he's talking about. ¹⁹ Then Jesus, perceiving that they were about to ask him, said to them, After this you ask one another, that I said, In a little while you shall not see me; and again a little while, then will you see me? ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will be sad, but let your sadness turn into joy. ²¹ A woman when she gives birth has pains, for her hour has come. But when she has given birth to the child, she no longer thinks of the fear for the sake of the joy that a human being has been born. ²² Ye also have sorrow now; but I want to see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice, and no one shall take your joy from you. ²³ And in that day you will ask me nothing. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you .

There are people who can be made very happy with small things. Even a flower by the wayside prepares you for a hearty smile. And even on the darkest of days, they look for the silver rim of the cloud that will herald the next sunny day. The reverse is also possible. There are people who can never be made happy and who are always sad, no matter what happens to them. It is therefore important to ask whether joy has anything to do with a person's situation at all. Isn't joy much more of a basic attitude than the experience of joy and sorrow that affects everyone? And if there is this basic attitude, where is it based? Can you train them? Or is there a drug for such joy?

Maybe there is all that. But even if there were such a thing, it always seems that the joys made by man have a short life expectancy and must quickly be replaced by this one or another happiness maker or even disappear altogether. Joy, if it is to be more than just the next ray of sunshine, needs a guarantee and a foundation that is more than a flower by the side of the road. And so, more than anything else, we should seek joy from the one who made it. Namely God. Yes, that's right. Joy does not come at all from Satan's toolbox, but is a gift from God, who has personally prepared it for us humans. The only thing Satan is good at is making a cheap copy of real joy and selling that so-called copy as real joy. Satan can do nothing better. He can only make things worse. He does this in two ways. Firstly, he gives people more and more desire to experience joy. But that's no joy. That's lust and it doesn't give us joy, it's much more like a chain that holds us captive and is like a rod that constantly chases us from one so-called joy to the next. Things like that can drive us insane and the story ends in complete disappointment and an inability to be happy about anything at all. Many have been driven into the abyss by such a copy of joy. On the other hand, Satan also pretends to his pious customers that joy has nothing at all to do with faith, and that true faith has to be something very serious and sad. He pretends to his pious candidates that as a "real Christian" one should not be happy, and should always have a serious expression, and always raise a finger when others have gotten on the wrong path. Unfortunately, there are enough people who are firmly convinced that joy and fun have nothing to do with church and faith. Such people can then never enjoy the genuine gifts of God because they are fundamentally suspicious of joy. Against all these destroyers of joy we should hold on. Joy comes from God! And it is even recognized in Galatians 5:22 as a gift of the Holy Spirit. That good Christians are spoilsports is not true at all! Today the name of Sunday literally calls us to such joy! "Rejoice!" But, I still feel a bit strange as a so-called joy caller. How can you call a person to rejoice? Especially when that person isn't doing well at all. Joy cannot be imposed or commanded. You can only have it or not have it. So let's follow today's Bible text to see how we can find the way from sadness to true joy. A joy

that is not a flash in the pan! A joy that is guaranteed to stay! A joy that can make itself at home in such a way that it becomes a part of us. Augustine, our Church Father, said something wonderful about joy: "The soul nourishes itself on that which it delights in." What is meant by this is that true joy is not a thing, but a person. In other words, it's not the gift that makes us happy, but the person who gives us the gift. The disciples of Jesus experienced all this in Jesus Christ. They got to know Jesus Christ and all of them, each for themselves, broke out of the usual path and went to Jesus' joy school. This school of joy was not always easy. Again and again they wanted to nail Jesus down to his gifts. When he multiplied bread, they wanted to make him the bread king who would eliminate the shopping wish list forever! And Jesus said: "I am the bread of life." And when he raised the dead man Lazarus, a big party broke out. It was now thought that Jesus would remove all problems from the world with the stroke of a pen. And Jesus answered: "I am the resurrection and the life!" So the disciples had to learn not only to receive the gifts from Jesus but also to receive him himself. Jesus not only showed them the way; He was the way, too. Not only did he teach the truth; he was the truth himself. He not only gave the resurrection; he himself was and is the resurrection. And now something came that must have torn the ground from under the feet of these disciples. This Jesus they had built everything on. This master of joy, Jesus, now announced that he was going away. So the reason for their joy would leave them! They would now stand there like orphans for no reason to rejoice. Everything would end on Good Friday. What a disappointment! It would have been better not to have known Jesus. Then they would have at least had their earthly life! Jesus, after all, was like a flower by the wayside that only brought joy for a little while. But Jesus' speech goes on: "And again a little while, and then you will see me." In this sentence, Jesus begins to talk about something completely different. The disciples of Jesus would be allowed to start a new chapter with Jesus. They would be able to experience and know Jesus in a different way. Jesus would dwell with them in the future through the Holy Spirit. The good thing about that promise is this: Jesus would be there through the Holy Spirit as well. But not only for the disciples, but also for us!

The Holy Spirit would be Jesus to us exactly as the physical Jesus was. There's just one thing we have to say very clearly. The joy that Jesus speaks of is made of a completely different material than we otherwise know in humans and in the world - humanly speaking, the joy of Jesus does not look rosy! Jesus showed this through his own life. The disciples themselves had to see something like this again and again in their lives: "If they persecute me, they will also persecute you," Jesus said. We can still experience something like this today, when we have to painfully realize that we are not from the world. Sadness, loss, and disappointment are companions of every disciple, of the whole Church, and of each of us who have become Christians. And yet we can experience genuine joy in the midst of sadness. We can experience this by putting sadness in its proper place. When something really bad happens, the misery and the sadness rear up. They're going to be big in life. They even occupy the first place in our thinking. It becomes the dominant one and is like a flood that wants to drown the whole of life. Because we are human, we should first perceive it that way. And Jesus himself confirms that it is so. But, through the faith God gives us, we may gradually and over time give sadness a second place. You can't learn something like that in a course. Something like this is very personally connected to Jesus himself - and is so firmly connected to Jesus that a part of our life with Jesus is hidden. So part of our joy isn't even tangible to our human emotions. Here's a little something special. Jesus does not say to his disciples, as would be logical: "then we shall meet again." No, he says: "then **ye shall** see me." What is meant by that is clear. Even if we can't see Jesus now, **He sees** us...even now. He sees us and knows our hearts and prays for us to the Heavenly Father. And someday we will see him as he already sees us. Now only he can see us and we cannot see him. Now we share our joy a little longer with pain, with sin, with weakness. All of this can make us very sad. But then the joy will be complete. The fact that he can already see me makes my heart happy today! Amen