

Live in Fellowship with God

✦ **complete joy (1:1-4)**

✦ **full forgiveness (1:5 – 2:2)**

In the name of Jesus, our risen and living Savior, dearly redeemed friends of God:

Isn't that a great concept, being "friends of God"? It's something that really impressed me while knocking on doors (1986-87) as our Lord Jesus gathered New Life congregation. The dear Holy Spirit keeps calling blood bought souls out of darkness into God's wonderful light. From many backgrounds souls find this *common union* of faith that looks to Christ alone. It's spectacular at Asian pastors conferences. If you know anything about the history of wars and conflicts in East Asia, to have men from Korea and Japan and China all worshipping the Lord in peace together is a miracle! God's grace unites us in and around Word and sacrament. That's why it's continually shocking to me as a pastor how most American Christians see only half of this miracle. Today the Holy Spirit wants to flesh this out for us as we continue rejoicing in what it means that *Christ is risen. He is risen indeed!* From the darkness of sin, unbelief and false teaching our Lord joins our hearts to **Live in Fellowship with God**. What a gift!

✦ **complete joy (1:1-4)**

The Holy Spirit's New Testament Greek word for **Fellowship** is *koinonia*. It can also be translated: *communion*, or *common union*. Anyone can draw a picture of *koinonia*. One vertical line with a line across. You can even draw the sign of the cross on your head and heart. That's what it took to remove the barrier of guilt and sin that stood between us humans and the absolutely perfect and holy God. He cannot tolerate sin any more than you could let a dairy farmer dump his manure wagon on your lawn. God has to remove the filth of our anger, frustration, yes, even the universal scourge of our racism – all must be gone to have **complete joy** in worship with God. How determined was God to unite us with Him?

John describes God's determination like this: *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have observed and our hands have touched regarding the Word of Life—the life appeared, and we have seen it. We testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We are proclaiming what we have seen and heard also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. We write these things to you so that our joy may be complete."*

John and his fellow apostles of Jesus were not innocent bystanders. They needed help to believe Jesus was alive again after they saw Him crucified, dead and buried. Today's Gospel lesson (Luke 24:36-49) lets us look in on Jesus and His disciples Easter evening. Eating with them, letting them touch His glorified body that can never die again. Opening their minds to see that God promised all along in the Holy Scriptures, the writings of the Old Testament, that the Messiah had to suffer and die, then rise again from the dead. Now they needed to spread that **complete joy** by preaching repentance and forgiveness.

One of my favorite illustrations of this miraculous **complete joy** we have in Jesus was from a conference at St. Croix Lutheran Academy. Pastor David Huebner was describing the day his mother-in-law passed from grace to glory. He had had been driving when his father-in-law started to cry. "No, it's not because I'm sad, it's because...." The fire alarm went off. We literally had to get up and leave the building in the middle of the sermon. Later Pastor Huebner finished the story. His father-in-law said, "These are tears of joy. I'm so glad she's home with Jesus. But I miss her too." Christians in the midst of trials and grief still have this great gift from our crucified and risen Savior: **complete joy** because of...

✠ full forgiveness (1:5 – 2:2)

“This is the message we heard from him and proclaim to you: God is light. In him there is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him but still walk in darkness, we are lying and do not put the truth into practice. But if we walk in the light, just as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his Word is not in us.”¹

Can you see the problems they were having back then? We still have them today. People want to criticize God as if He’s in the dark about some things. Personally they’ll say, “God does not know what I’m going through.” Or, “God doesn’t know how I feel.” One neighbor insisted, “I don’t have any sins.” Others are taught that God would never really damn anyone for their sins. Or that sin is not so bad because everyone does this or that. All this makes God ***out to be a liar*** by closing the doors of your heart.

Later John writes about someone who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother. (2:9f) Did someone hurt you? A former friend? Or as someone said, “I won’t go to church with my ex-.” None of this helps to **Live in Fellowship with God**. He creates *koinonia* not just between forgiven sinners and Himself, but between all of us. So ask yourself: “Am I failing to forgive as Christ forgave me? Am I putting myself under God’s judgment where Jesus says, ***“If you forgive people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive people their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”*** (Matthew 6:14f)

God’s way is to ***confess our sins*** then find that He is ***faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness***. To ***confess*** literally means to *say the same thing* as God. About our sins: “Yes, Lord, whatever you say is sin, truly is sin.” About ourselves: “Yes, Lord, you say I deserve your wrath and punishment for my sins; I ***confess*** I do.” About our God: “Yes, Lord, you say you forgive me all my sins for Jesus’ sake; I trust in your **full forgiveness** according to your Word.” About new life in Christ: “Yes, Lord, you want me to live in the gladness and joy of Jesus; help me and I will!”

Live in Fellowship with God includes both the vertical *koinonia* of the cross and also the horizontal *common-union* with fellow Christians. This is congregations that are faithful to God’s Word practice “Close Communion.” God wants us all to believe the same things according to His Word, not to say, “It’s just a matter of interpretation.” Or act as if God’s truth can be shaved a little here and there. So we ask our guests to speak with the pastor first before taking Holy Communion with us. If they have not been instructed and confirmed in our fellowship, Christ warns about taking His Holy Supper to our damnation instead of the blessing He intends. All our communicant members were either confirmed after Catechism or took adult instructions, our Bible Information Class. BIC is a great review which many have accessed for their own **complete joy and full forgiveness to Live in Fellowship with God**.

This side of heaven we can never stop sinning. So God never stops forgiving fully and freely, so that we can fully and freely forgive each other. John says in these last sweet words: ***“My children, I write these things to you so that you will not sin. If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.”*** Jesus is your defense attorney in heaven to plead your case for **full forgiveness to stay in Fellowship with God**.

In our closing hymn, “Our sins they are many, his mercy is more,” picture: ***“Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.”*** (Micah 7:18f NIV84) Amen.

¹ EHV ~ Evangelical Heritage Version (<http://wartburgproject.org>) © 2019. NPH: 800-662-6022, Amazon-Kindle, LOGOS. For *The Preacher’s Apprentice (TPA)* sermon study or copies: m.cordes@comast.net . New Life Evangelical Lutheran Church You can also call: 651-484-1169. Hear the sermon at www.newlifeshoreview.com . 180 County Rd F - Shoreview, MN 55126