

“Best Friends Forever” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Friendship Sunday August 20, 2023

- I. **John 15:12-17** – As Jesus commands us to love one another...
- II. **What is a friend?**
 - a. That question is much harder to answer than you might know.
 - b. Even experts are not able to give the exact nature of a friend, because we all have different understandings of what and who a friend is.
 - c. Some of us, although it's very rare, have a best friend from childhood that we still talk to and maintain a deep relationship with.
 - d. Most of us hit a certain age – whether it's time to marry and start a family or begin a career and move ahead to different things – but that usually means we don't have time for friends like we once did.
 - e. And then there is Facebook... a social media company based on the concept of connecting with so called, “friends”.
 - i. I read an article where a judge did not have to recuse herself from overseeing a trial even though she was Facebook friends with an attorney in that trial.
 - ii. It took an appeals court in Florida to make a legal ruling that, “Legally, Facebook friends aren't necessarily your friends.”¹
 1. I don't know about you, but I already figured that one out...
 - iii. Yet, many people have hundreds of Facebook friends, and would say that they have no personal friends, or maybe one or two close friends.
 - iv. Certainly, Facebook is not all bad, especially since it reconnects us with people from our distant past and develops new relationships, but it is a stretch to say these are our real friends.
 - f. Today we live in a world where friendship can span the world, but this might include old school written letters and phone calls, texting, video chatting, among other ways of communicating other than in person.
 - i. Many times, the longest lasting, closest friendships begin in person and are forged in fire.
 1. The fires of military service together,
 2. the fires of missionary work,
 3. the fires of a challenging career or educational process,
 4. the fires of natural disasters – (like the literal fire in Maui and the friendships that are now being forged) –
 5. and the fires of emotional distress and disease.
 - ii. After these deep connections are made, we might remain best friends forever – staying in touch by whatever means are necessary.
 - g. So, back to the question of what is friend?

- i. The Bible tells us that friends, “always love” (Proverbs 17:17); help us to grow (Proverbs 27:17); help to lift us up in times of need (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12); and restore and forgive (Galatians 6:1).
 - h. However, the sad thing about our world today is that friendships are more and more difficult to find... and to foster... and to keep.
 - i. Why is that? What is going on that’s different in the past?
 - i. One reason could be the distance between people today – it seems that in the past, many people were in the same neighborhood, but now we spread out farther away from one another.
 - ii. Another reason is the busy lives we lead – when we have a lot going on, making time for friends is a commitment of time and energy that we might not have.
 - iii. And another reason is fear...
 - 1. If a person out there really got to know me, would they still love me, accept me, and like me?
 - 2. This is what makes Jesus being our “Friend” such an amazing gift – He chose us when we were completely unworthy of it!
 - 3. It seems that Paul was reflecting on Jesus’ words in our Gospel today when he wrote, “⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- ⁸ but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8)

III. **Jesus is the definition of a true friend.**

- a. He is speaking to the disciples in our Gospel lesson... and is helping them understand what it means to be connected to Him like a branch is connected to a vine – and all the nutrients and support is there for us.
- b. Over a couple of chapters of the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that our connection to Him gives us a connection to the Father (as the vinedresser John 15:1), and the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17) – but all of this will bear fruit for the glory of God.
- c. I suppose it’s hard to put in perspective what it means to be “friends” with God, but this is what Jesus tells us – “you are My friends if you do what I command you.” (vs 14)
 - i. Now, some of you might be thinking that Jesus is making a conditional statement like a 5-year-old... “I will be your friend, *if* you give me that piece of candy.”
 - ii. However, it’s not a conditional connection, because He follows it up by saying that we are NOT His slaves, forced to do what He says, but His friends, who gladly obey His commands because we love Him.
 - 1. As Martin Luther writes, “[Jesus] says, as it were: “Since I have made you My friends and bestow all My love on you, I have a

right to demand of you that you, in return, love one another as friends.”²

2. Jesus sees the fruit of the Gospel to be a loving connection between each other – that the barriers of distance, time, or even fear do not keep us from loving each other.

d. Of all places, here in church we should be able to set these barriers aside and love one another as Jesus loved us.

IV. **The love Jesus showed us is the gold standard.**

a. In human form, God dwelt among us, and chose to die in our place.

b. None of us could ever measure up to be His true friend... the Bible tells us that we all sin and fall short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23) and that we have inherited the sin sickness of our ancestors.

c. Without an outside intervention and the forgiveness of our sins, we are simply broken and separated from any relationship with God.

d. We are called friends only through the work of Jesus, going to the cross in our place (our deserved punishment)

i. He loved us so much He never wanted to be apart from us – which is exactly what sin does – separates.... But as Ephesians 1 tells us: “⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure”; and “¹¹ because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for He chose us in advance.” (Ephesians 1:5; 11)

e. This is the context of our reading today, as Jesus points to the cross, where He would give up everything so that we might follow Him in our actions – especially to love one another.

V. **Today is friendship** Sunday, but not the same as friendship in the world.

a. Sure, we may have some friends here – maybe even best friends.

b. However, the true friendship God desires is based on Him – and the love we share as it flows from His sacrificial love.

c. If you are a guest, or you are a new member being welcomed, or you are an old member glued to the pew for 60 years... today we are friends in Christ.

d. There is no higher connection or friendship, as it transcends the world... and will never end... it lives on to eternity.

e. That is true friendship – because in Christ we are truly best friends... forever. Amen.

¹ Source: Associated Press, “Appeals Court Says Facebook Friends aren’t Always Friends,” ABC News (8-24-17)

² Luther, M. (1999). Luther’s works, vol. 24: Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 14-16 (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.; Vol. 24, p. 252). Concordia Publishing House.