

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
World Communion Sunday
October 4, 2026
9:30 AM

Text: John 15:12-17

Theme: Love One Another: You Are My Friends

[prayer]

Thirteenth century theologian Thomas Aquinas once suggested that the goal of the Christian life is to become friends with God.

Which begs the question, church: Do you call yourself a friend of God?

Maybe you do. Or maybe you are like me, and it feels a little presumptuous to do so. After all, by what right can a flawed and sinful human being call themselves a friend of the Almighty? Friendship assumes equality, mutuality, reciprocity, but what equality can exist between humankind and the Creator of the universe?

And yet, the Letter of James reminds us that Abraham “was called God’s friend” (Ja 2:22-24 CEB). David was described as a man after God’s own heart (cf. 1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). And here at the Last Supper, Jesus tells his disciples, “I don’t call you servants any longer...I call you friends” (John 15:15).

So, it appears that friendship with the divine is not that audacious after all. Indeed, friendship with God is a worthy endeavor, if you consider Abraham, David, and Jesus people worth emulating.

Emulation or imitation is at the heart of the classical definition of friendship. “A friend,” said Aristotle, “is another self.” In other words, a friend is someone with whom we share something in common: hobbies, interests, life experiences, a similar sense of humor. A really good friend is someone we can confide in, someone we can trust. And a really, *really* good friend will challenge, inspire, and encourage us to be our best selves.

To be a friend of Jesus is to be formed in the Way of Jesus. Jesus tells his disciples that they will be known as his friends if they love one another “as I have loved you” (v. 13). This is Jesus’s commission for his friend: Continue my mission by imitating the kind of love I have demonstrated. *You are my disciples if you do as I have done.* The disciples’ relationships with each other should be like their relationship with Jesus, which in turn reflects Jesus’s relationship with the Father. This is a relationship that is defined by mutual and reciprocal love: Love that, in the words of theologian David Cunningham, “is concerned about others; not possessive or subordinating...[love that is] superabundant, such that it can be offered without reserve.”¹

Or, in the words of Jesus, “No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends” (v. 13). Jesus is about to demonstrate that great love on the cross. Just like when he washed Judas’s feet, Jesus knows that these people he is calling his friends are going to deny and abandon him. Still, he gives them that title: “friend.” Lord, what an honor it is to be called a friend of Jesus! Because the friendship that Jesus demonstrates, the love he offers, is not limited to those who are “worthy” of God’s friendship. God’s friendship is for the sinner even more than it is for the saint. And Jesus trusts that *these* sinners, gathered at the table of fellowship with him, breaking bread and sharing the cup, will eventually rise to the occasion and continue the work he has begun.

Will we rise to the occasion, church? Can we, too, believe that Jesus has called us his friends? And if we believe, how does that change us, change the way we act?

Scripture teaches us that a friend of God does the will of God by keeping the commandments of God. And the greatest commandment of God is love. Love God and love one another as you love yourself. Love God *by* loving one another.

In John 21, Jesus appears to the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. It is morning and he is in his resurrected body. He starts a fire on the beach, and he cooks some fish and toasts some bread, and he invites the disciples to have breakfast with him. Fish and bread, like when he fed the five thousand.

¹ From *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year B, Vol. 2 – Lent through Eastertide*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008). Page 498.

When they had finished eating, Jesus turned to Simon Peter, the disciple who had denied him three times. “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter replied, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.”

Jesus nodded. “Okay, then feed my lambs.”

Then Jesus asked a second time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

And Peter replied, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you.”

Again, Jesus nodded. “Okay, then take care of my sheep.”

Then, he asked a third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was sad that Jesus still did not believe that he loved him. Perhaps Jesus might never forgive what Peter had said and done; perhaps Jesus might never trust Peter again. Desperate, Peter replied, “Lord, you know everything; you know I love you.”

And Jesus smiled and said, “Good. Feed my sheep...then follow me.”

The Greek word for love in this story is *fileto*. Can you guess what it means? “Friend love.” Jesus is asking Peter, “Are you my friend?” And when Peter answers in the affirmative, Jesus says, “Don’t just tell me. *Show* me. Show me by caring for one another.”

On this World Communion Sunday, we remember how Jesus handed his disciples a piece of bread and said, “This is my body, broken for you. *Do* this in remembrance of me.” Observe this sacrament in remembrance of Jesus, but more importantly, *do* what Jesus has done. Lay down your lives for one another. Lay down your lives by extending the hand of friendship to those the world considers unworthy. Lay down your lives by caring for the needs of others as much, if not more, than you care for your own. Lay down your lives by prioritizing your relationships with each other above all else.

Jesus is here, at the Lord's Table, offering us the bread of friendship. We are bound together by the love he has extended to us, no matter our sin, no matter how unworthy we are. That love is greater than anything that might divide us. Eat. Taste and see that the Lord is good. And after you have been fed, turn around and offer that same bread of friendship to your neighbors. When we commit ourselves to doing this, we might just find that friendship has the power to change the world. Amen.