

Sermon

“Friends of Christ”

A Sermon for Cary Presbyterian Church

Sunday, May 2, 2021

Fifth Sunday After Easter

Prayer for Illumination:

Lord Jesus, our “first, fast, last friend.” We relax in the cadence of you as our loyal, friendly, advocate. And we are not wrong to imagine ourselves as your friends. It is no presumption to acknowledge that intimacy — for you, yourself told us of your friendship.

But you are Lord too! Not *just* friend, *but Lord*.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love....

...14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

So, speak to us again this Lord’s Day of friendship in its purest and most noble form. Speak as only a friend can speak — telling us the truth in love. Loving us enough to speak your unsettling truth not just to destroy our falsehood, but also to build us up in your love.

And for our part, we will listen. We will follow. We will accept the yoke of your Lordship without complaint. Indeed, we may even dare to learn from you gladly. In the name of our friend, Jesus. Amen.

Psa. 98:0 A Psalm.

- 1 O sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things.
His right hand and his holy arm
have gotten him victory.*
- 2 The LORD has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.*
- 3 He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness
to the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen
the victory of our God.*

*Psa. 98:4 Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.*

- 5 Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.*
- 6 With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.*

*Psa. 98:7 Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
the world and those who live in it.*

- 8 Let the floods clap their hands;
let the hills sing together for joy*
- 9 at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming
to judge the earth.
He will judge the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.*

*John 15:9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.
10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have
kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 I have said these
things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be
complete.*

*John 15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have
loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for
one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do*

not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

I. Today's message is not a full-blown sermon . . . more of a homily.

A. The liturgy today both for installation of deacon Peg Giesbrecht and for Communion is rich.

1. So I urge you to work at the liturgy...

† **Listen carefully to the prayers and statements**

† **Consider how they apply to you and your journey of faith**

† **Resist shifting into auto-pilot and *engage* with the liturgy - listening to it as you might listen to the sermon on another Sunday.**

II. In the late 4th century CE St. Ambrose (Bishop of Milan)

wrote:

Because God is true, friends can be true. Because God offers friendship, we can be each other's friends.

And not many years later St. Augustine of Hippo wrote in his *Confessions* that true friendship is based on 3 qualities:

- † *Seeking to do good (moral behavior)*
- † *Trustworthiness*
- † *Movement toward unity (working together for the common good)*

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St Augustine believed that in this world two things are essential:

- † **life and friendship.**
- † **Mere life is not enough:**
- † **if a human being is to be a real person then there must be friendship.**

III.

- **All of our friendships are derivative of the relationship we have with Christ, who in the powerful poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins we are reminded is our,**

“First, Fast, Last Friend.”¹

IV. John 15 — Jesus culminated his teaching by telling us they we are his, “friends.”

John 15:12 “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

B. This idea of the Christian community as a community of authentic friendship is so important.

- 1. We help one another to take our faith seriously by holding one another lovingly-accountable for our behavior.**
- 2. We help one another sustain a**

¹ last phrase of *The Lantern Out Of Doors*

narrative of hope.

- 3. A launching pad for virtuous living - a place where we discover our true-self and find courage to live as that person in a troubled world.**
- 4. Finally — we are the sort of community which can allow one another to grow in grace:**

“Still, when we ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not-knowing, not-curing, not-healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is the friend who cares.”

-Henri Nouwen: Seeds of Hope: A Henri Nouwen Reader p. 129

V. Even a cursory glance at the news-feed, or FaceBook, or Twitter is enough to make plain the desperate need in our world of friends of Christ.

- We are made friends of the almighty through no fault of our own. It is *grace*.**

- **But that act of grace is meant to shape us into true friends who know the one we follow.**

You are my friends if you do what I command you.

- A. **By God’s mercy, we have not only the friendship of God — but one another with whom we can learn what it means to be true friends to one another and true friends of God too.**
- B. **This week as you daily pray - I ask you to ponder what friendship with Christ demands of you.**
 - 1. **I’ll be doing the same.**