

Sermon: I Have Called You Friends
Scripture: Mark 9:33-37, John 15:9-17
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Stewardship Sunday
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Our first Scripture reading is from Gospel of Mark, chapter 9 verses 33-37. Jesus teaches the disciples about the difference between measuring about each other's greatness and the true act of greatness. In few words of wisdom, Jesus shows that having a mind of servanthood is how we are called. Hear the wisdom of the Lord from Mark chapter 9.

Mark 9:33-37

³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when [Jesus] was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" ³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Our second scripture is from Gospel of John 15:9-17. It is a latter half story, I'm the true vine passage, which is one of many famous I AM Johannian passages: I AM... the bread, the light of the world, the gate, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way and the truth and the life. Jesus tells his disciples to abide in him, opening up to share how much each of his disciples are dear to him. Let us hear the Word of God, as that promise is extended to us this morning.

John 15:9-17

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.

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.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks to be God, amen.

Let us pray: Merciful God, your Word is lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Would you open our ears and hearts to hear your Word and know your voice? May the words of my mouth and meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.

When was the last time you felt happy? Often when people start thinking about a response to this question, many think about the last big event that brought joy in their lives: Birth of a child, purchase of a home, reaching their goals, dreams and accomplishments. I hope that each of you did not have to go back too far, because we can take happiness from the little things of life, such as cooler morning like today, the nice weather, and the fact that we got up from our bed this morning.

These small joys in our lives often remain that way – *small* – unless we use and introduce a multiplier. Everything, regardless of how minuscule, when you share your happiness with friends and family, it seems to multiply, doesn't it? When we share our thoughts and feelings that brought us happiness with our beloved ones, their reaction to our happiness suddenly seems to add on top of what we are feeling, our being, and seems to make everything that much sweeter. Let's admit it. Ever since our 25th birthday, it seems like there are less things to celebrate about lives. And on our successive day of our birth, being an adult is hard. Getting older has its pains and aches – both physically and psychologically. But what makes our days special – our special days even more special and meaningful? It is when friends remember you, treasure you, laugh with you, and remind you that there are small happiness all around us if we choose look for them.

One of the movies that I watched as a teenager and continue to enjoy sequel as an adult that shares the deep meaning of friendship is a movie called *Toy Story*. Its theme song, "You've Got a Friend In Me," is heard each time, showing off a band of toys who depict what true friendship is all about, epitomized by the relationship between Woody and Buzz.

Some of you are probably humming the intro: You've got a friend in me~ But did you know these are the lyrics of the song?

You got troubles, I've got 'em too
There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you
We stick together and see it through
'Cause you've got a friend in me

Some other folks might be
A little bit smarter than I am
Bigger and stronger too

Maybe
But none of them will ever love you
The way I do

And as the years go by
Our friendship will never die
You're gonna see it's our destiny
You've got a friend in me

Jesus tells us this same message in today's passage. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I heard from my father.

Did you notice that in both the song and today's passage, there are congruent message that we are chosen to be a friend? You've Got a friend in me... means you didn't have to ask for it. The friendship that grew out of love is given to you, a love that will never die, a type of love that will never waiver, a type of love that will celebrate with you or cry with you when the time calls for it. Isn't that what Jesus told us about our Heavenly Father's love for us? Isn't that what Paul wrote when he was convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love: Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell... can ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus.¹

There is a hymn that speaks of Jesus as our friend too, cleverly called, What a Friend We Have in Jesus. It was penned by Joseph Scriven, who dedicated his life to serve the underprivileged in Canada. The small note at the bottom of our hymnal says he wrote this to comfort his mother when she was going through a time of special sorrow. Scriven himself was no stranger to sorrow. 12 years prior to having this spiritual poem written, he had lost his fiancée the night before their wedding in an accident. He must have wanted to encourage his mom based on his experience, and wrote these words, which later became a classic that is known to many of us. Hear his first verse:

*What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer
Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.*

¹ Romans 8:38-39

Rev. Glenn McDonald says this about this story in conjunction to today's passage.

In John 15:15 Jesus tells his disciples, "I call you my friends." There are times in life - and we must say this with great care - that we don't need God so much to be our Rock, our Shepherd, or even our Father. We need a friend.

A friend is someone who walks with us. Who "gets" us. Who listens without judgment. Who laughs at our jokes, puts up with our strange habits, and delights to hear our voice at the other end of a phone call.

Likewise, many of us in our earthly journeys, have experienced pain and loss. We have also tasted and have seen what it means to have a friend in Jesus because of those times. We are leaning on our heavenly friendship more than ever, as we traverse the unpredictable landscape of COVID these days.

Friends, then what is required of us who has a friend in Jesus? It is to love another as Jesus has loved us. As Jesus shares with us, in Mark's gospel, to welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me. So we need to be loving and welcoming in our lives, in our ministry together, as one welcomes and invites a child into our arms. We are called to be a friend to all walks in life: both to joyous and to those who mourn in Christ's name.

Therefore friends, as those who are in abundance of God's blessings, let us be a good stewards, better yet, a good friend of Jesus to extend the love of Christ by sharing our talents, our gifts, our time, a song, a prayer, or in whatever shape and fashion God tugs on your heart each morning. Trusting in God's care, that in all things, God works for the good of those who love God, who have been called according to God's purpose.² Let us partner in ministry by offering glory, honor, and everything that we are, lifting our hearts and hands before the King, who chose to lower Oneself to be our friend, who is worthy to be praised, forever and ever. Amen.

² Romans 8:28