

Sixth Weekend of Easter (RCL/B): "Friendship"
1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17
May 4-5, 2024
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Think about the **best** friend you've ever had, past or present. How do they **excel** in friendship? What qualities do they have, what have they done (or **not** done), that earns them an A+ in friendship??

What examples of friendship come to mind from the Bible? Who are described as friends, or who act as friends?

- Abraham is described as a friend of God: **trust, obedience**. Isaiah 41:8: could literally be translated, "Abraham, who loved Me."

*⁸ But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of **Abraham, my friend**;
⁹ you whom I took from the ends of the earth
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, "You are my servant;
I have chosen you and not cast you off";
¹⁰ do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you; I will help you;
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. (NRSV)*

- David & Jonathan: **affection, loyalty** of peers
- Ruth and Naomi: **affection, loyalty** of daughter-in-law toward mother-in-law
- Friends of the paralytic, who lowered their friend through a hole they dug in the roof, to lay him at Jesus' feet: **intercession, persistence**: doing for him what he could not do for himself, taking him to the Healer.

⁷ One day while [Jesus] was teaching... the power of the Lord was with him to heal. ¹⁸ Just then some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a stretcher. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, ¹⁹ but, finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down on

*the stretcher through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. ²⁰ When he saw **their** faith, he said, "**Friend**, your sins are forgiven you." (Luke 5:7, 18-20, NRSV)*

- Philip and Nathanael: Philip introduces Nathanael to Jesus; **patience** with his lack of enthusiasm, **persistence and generosity** in sharing the knowledge and gift he has found in Jesus!

⁴³ The next day Jesus... found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ...

⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." (John 1:43, 45-46, NRSV)

BTW: Andrew is a **friend** as well as a brother to Simon, in the same way!

⁴⁰ One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴² He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter). (John 1:40-42)

- Centurion who is a benefactor of local synagogue and who asks Jesus to heal his slave: **monetary support** and **intercession**: doing for the slave what he cannot do for himself.

² A centurion [in Capernaum] had a slave whom he valued highly and who was ill and close to death. ³ When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." ⁶ And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; ⁷ therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed..." ⁹ When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and, turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." ¹⁰ When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

The tie-in to today's Gospel is, of course, Jesus' words to His disciples:

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**.

*¹⁴You are **my** friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I 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.” (John 15, NRSV)*

True friendship requires reciprocity, give-and-take, mutual investment of time and energy, shared devotion, on the part of both people. Someone has said that the sign of real loyalty in friendship is “taking seriously what the friend takes seriously.”¹ Jesus takes love and service seriously: **so** seriously that being **His** friend means loving and serving those whom **He** loves: “... love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:34)

The really tough thing about that is the **indiscriminate** way in which Jesus loves. He doesn’t exercise the kind of “good judgment” we counsel our children to use when they choose their friends. Jesus doesn’t factor **worthiness** into the equation. If He did, He wouldn’t love any of **us**, because as St. Paul wrote, we “*all fall short of the glory of God.*” (Romans 3:23) So we’re **glad** for our Lord’s indiscriminate taste when it comes to **us**, but may bristle a bit when we realize that, by extension, “worthiness” isn’t supposed to factor into our choice of those we love and serve in His name.

Today’s Gospel reminds us that the love of Jesus is always “outward bound.” Jesus calls for our love of Him to be “outward bound,” too. “Me & Jesus” is not only bad grammar, it’s also a bad description of the spiritual life of a Christian. This is why we worship as a community, study as a community, play and enjoy fellowship as a community, serve as a community. It is why our community is never intended to be insular, clubby, exclusive. We are to have permeable boundaries that readily admit and welcome others. We are to be continually going forth in mission beyond these walls, to do hands-on ministry **and** by sending money that fuels ministry **others** perform in places and ways beyond our ability,

through our benevolence to the Synod, and through donations to many other service organizations.

Many of you will be familiar with this advice about friendship:

“Go often to the house of thy friend, for weeds choke the unused path.”

If our friendship with Jesus is to thrive, the more often we come to His house (this house of worship where He feeds us on Word & Sacrament), the better! The wise person who said, “Go often to the house of thy friend,” is Ralph Waldo Emerson. He had a good friend in Henry David Thoreau. When Thoreau was jailed because he refused to pay his poll tax to protest the way it supported slavery, Emerson went to visit him and asked, “What are you doing in there, Henry?” Thoreau responded, “What are **you** doing out **there**, Ralph?” A good friend challenges us to listen to our conscience, to heed our better angels, to act with courage, to love as we have been loved. Our Friend Jesus certainly does that, if we’re listening. He calls us to exercise tough love with each other, too. Amen

¹ Gerard Sloyan, *John, Interpretation series* (Louisville: John Knox, 1987), p. 189.

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