

May 17, 2009 – Acts 10: 44-48; 1 John 5: 1-6; John 15: 9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 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. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

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

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.

I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

FRIENDS ON A JOURNEY OF FAITH

Think of someone you would like to walk on the beach with – someone to go to Tim Horton's with – someone to share a joy or frustration with – someone to just **be** with. That person is a friend.

Friends are people with whom you dare to be yourself. Your soul can be naked with them. They ask you to put on nothing, only to be what you are. They do not want you to be better or worse. You do not have to be on your guard. You can say what you think, as long as it is genuinely you. Friends understand those contradictions in your nature that lead others to misjudge you. With them you breathe freely. You can avow your little vanities and envies and hates and vicious sparks, your meanness and absurdities, and in opening them up to friends, those weaknesses are lost, dissolved on the white ocean of the friend's loyalty. They understand. You do not have to be careful. You can keep still with them. They like you. You can weep with them, sing with them, laugh with them, pray with them. Through it all they see you, know you, and love you.

A friend is someone with whom you dare to be yourself.

Jesus said, *"I have called you friends."*

John's gospel is overflowing with Jesus' assurances of his love for his disciples and commands for his followers to love others, but only here does Jesus call the disciples friends. Friendship implies choice. Real friendship – mature friendship – isn't automatic; it's intentional, it takes work, and requires commitment. Friends need to share and communicate.

Jesus said, *"... I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father."*

Jesus was honest and didn't hold back – he expressed his true self. He demonstrated a ministry of companionship that was about working through the questions of life together in loving relationship. He drew his disciples as friends – not as converts who understood and complied with his every wish – as friends, talking and wondering together.

The friendship that Jesus speaks about is a relationship of mutual affection – it is a relationship of love. Jesus emphasizes that our love for one another is how we show our love for God. The evidence that we follow Christ is not in our theology, or that we go to church. The evidence that we follow Christ is seen in how we treat one another.

Jesus taught many things, but the one thing he taught more than anything else was about love – love that binds people together in a very relational and spiritual way – love that thinks of the other before the self.

When he calls us friends he describes a radical relationship– not merely social acquaintance – not just another picture on the *facebook* page. He is talking about a lifestyle of love for one another because we need one another. Jesus spent time with those he called friends – shared his ideas, his faith, his struggles – journeyed with them and encouraged them to journey with one another.

Jesus chose to be a friend – chose to be our friend – on purpose, not by accident. He was intentional about the relationship he envisioned for us to have with him and with one another. We are intended to be friends.

Sometimes we come to church expecting to get all the answers – sometimes we come expecting all the answers we think we have to be affirmed – sometimes we come hoping that no one will discover how many questions we have. But we are intended to be friends – companions on the journey – safe in one another’s company as we wrestle with what it means to be God’s human creation in this world.

Recently I discovered a DVD series entitled, Living the Questions, which fits with this understanding. Let’s watch two short clips...

[“An invitation to journey”, Session 1, Chapter 12 \(28:43 – 31:42\) Bishop Jack Spong](#)
[“Out into the world...”, Session 12, Chapter 3 \(7:33 – 9:00\) Stephen Patterson](#)

[These clips are not available with this posting for copyright reasons.]

These are just a few glimpses into this provocative DVD series that I hope to share with you in the summer – please to talk to me later about how you can participate in the discussion.

I chose these pieces to encourage us to think of our life and our faith in terms of a journey rather than a destination – as a journey that we are on together as friends in Jesus. The friendship that Jesus calls us to is not one of passive contemplation of God and divine things. Jesus calls friends – draws us into the unity of relationship that Jesus shares with God to help us bear fruit. It is that fruit that enlivens some communities of faith and gives them the confidence to continue wrestling and living the questions of life. As friends of Jesus we are invited to a life on *The Way* – a process of transformation.

Think of it – *no longer do I call you servants... I call you friends*. How amazing is that? What a gift! Consider the overall poverty of performance and character of the disciples – they are not known for understanding what Jesus says or for their reliability and loyalty – they misunderstand, betray and deny – yet Jesus calls them friends. And think for moment about our own poverty of faith and commitment – what a wonder it is that Jesus invites us to be his friends! What a wonder that we can journey with one another as friends, fellow travelers on the path of faith.

Just over a week ago a colleague asked me how our congregation reaches out to people beyond our community of faith. It is always a bit of an awkward question for me because we are much better at connecting with people once they are here that we are at inviting people to come among us. Perhaps as we focus on living the questions of faith – sharing the struggles of who and what God calls us to be in this broken world – we can more comfortably invite family, acquaintances and other social contacts to join us in this journey of faith as friends. **Amen.**

This Sermon Copy reflects the style of the spoken word rather than the written word. Allowances should be made for grammatical style and sentence structure that are characteristic of the spoken word. The Rev. L. T. Kavanagh, 2009