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May 7, 2023

Scripture: John 15: 12-17

Sermon Title: Friendship with God

Prayer...

Introduction:

Story of Renovare in Atlanta Georgia and hearing Trevor Hudson speak.

Trevor is the author of close to 20 books and last year received the first

Richard Foster Spiritual Formation Award presented at George Fox

University. I know Space for Grace is using one of his books.

Every year I am humbled to learn from him and to teach with him.

One talk he gave was on Friendship with God.

He highlighted that as Christians we use many images and names for

God, such as Savior, Father, King, Master, and Lord. He suggested that all

these are good images for God, but he gently suggested that one of the

primary ways we might image God is seeing God as our friend.

I want to ask you the question. Do you image God as your friend?

Drawing from Trevor's teaching and Scripture, I want to make the case today that friendship with God, Jesus, Holy Spirit is actually not only one option for imaging God, but I wonder if it is not the most important way to image God.

In our text today, Jesus tells his disciples that he calls them his friends. He no longer calls him servants, because the servant does not know what the Master is doing. No, Jesus calls his disciples friends because they are willing to follow his commandment of love. All the commandments help the disciples remain or abide in God's love and the disciples are called Jesus' friends because they are following the way of love. Jesus call the disciples friends and then calls them to be friends with one another even if that requires great sacrificial love.

I think friendship is a powerful way to talk about our relationship with God. I even think for many of us talking about God as friend has the potential to take us to a deeper intimacy with God than referring to God

as parent. Again, imaging God as a parent is good and helpful, but for many of us relating to God as a parent, might actually keep God at a distance. For example, for many people imaging God as Father pictures God as the authority and the one in charge of our lives, but just like when we were young and literally looked up to our dad or mom, we might see God as a bit intimidating. For some the image of parent is hard because we might picture God as the one who even punishes us or tells us to behave or be obedient like parent naturally do. Again, there is a role that parents play in being the leaders of the home and helping kids behave in a certain way, but Jesus does something radical by calling the disciples his friends. He treats them more like an equal. He gets down at their level and calls them to be friends with one another. He wants to be their friends, so that they can experience fully the joy of being human and the joy of love. Following the commandment of loving one another will enable them to remain in an experience of God's love and to also experience deeply a loving friendship with God. Imaging

Jesus as friend is for the purpose of the disciples more fully experiencing God's love.

For some of us, we might feel more comfortable thinking of God as Father, King, or Lord because it keeps God big and us small. This again is not wrong, but the reason Jesus came to earth is to make God more approachable, more real, more like a friend. God invites us into this intimacy.

I have noticed that part of this idea of God as a friend is seen in our music. Much of the modern worship music today does a good job of talking about God as friend. This generation and the Jesus People generation of the 70's as well, hunger for a close relationship with God. We are hungry for an experience of God. It is no longer enough to only have good theology, good doctrines of belief. We long for a tangible experience of God. We do not want a distant God. We can use the image of king, Savior, Lord, Father, Mother, parent. Yes, but what we really long for the most is a friend in God. Why?

Because when God is your friend, when Jesus is your friend, when Holy Spirit is your friend, you can be real with God. A good friend is safe and is available for us to share our deepest longings and dreams. A true friend is safe for us to share our deepest sorrows and will be there for us. Yes, some of our friends at times do not live up to this goal, but the best friends do love us well. Jesus is very clear in this passage that he wants to call us friends and he wants us to learn from our friendship with him and be true friends with one another.

A little later in our worship service, we will receive the bread and cup of communion. The Lord's Supper shows us a table of friends and Jesus modeling that a true friend will give up his life for his friends. We are called to remember the friendship and love of Jesus each day and every time we receive the bread and cup.

For some of us it is sometimes hard to image God as a friend because of the grief we experience in our lives, but I hope you might remember that God is the friend who comforts us and hears our grief. Maybe our

human friends have not always been safe. God is the one who is always kind to us and a good listener. Many young adults I work with are encouraged to move from seeing God only as a Father to seeing God as a friend. Modern worship focuses on this, such as the David Crowder song we heard. Remember the lyrics to Crowder's song.

I've got a friend

Closer than a brother

There is no judgement

Oh, how He loves me

I've got a friend

And He is my strength

He is my portion

With me in the valley

With me in the fire

With me in the storm

Let all my life testify

Hallelujah

We are not alone

God really loves us

God really loves us

I encourage you this morning and always to see God as your friend.

Imagine that God is your closest friend, who truly knows your heart and wants the best for you.

As we trust that God is our closest friend, may I suggest three ways to grow one's friendship with God.

Three ways:

1. Be honest about how you currently relate to God. Embrace the image of God as friend (story of worship, God coming down to dance with us.)

2. Daily have conversation with God, Jesus, Holy Spirit as if you were talking to a friend. Listen as well. Share your deepest joys and sorrows.
3. Do whatever helps you feel God's friendship. Walk in nature, prayer, bible study, service to others. Loving well helps you experience God's friendship and love.

Remember friends that God really loves us. We are not alone. Jesus is our friend and as we walk in love we will experience God's friendship more deeply.

Let us pray...

AMEN.



John 15:12-17

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[a] any longer, because the servant[b] 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.