

Chris Murphy

September 15th, 2024

Scripture: John 15: 9-17

Sermon Title: Love and Friendship

Prayer...

Introduction:

Last Sunday I began a sermon series on peace and love and I highlighted that in September we will focus on love and then in October, we will move to the topic of peace. We started our series last week focusing on the powerful idea that God is love and that the most important purpose in our lives is to experience God's love. Out of an experience of God's love, we then are equipped to show love to others and to also work for peace in this world.

This morning I am taking us back to my favorite part of the Bible. John chapter 15 to me more than any other passage in Scripture highlights the heart of Jesus for God and his disciples. Last Sunday, I said the most important verse in the Bible is 1 John 4: 8, where it says that God is love. But for me the most important chapter of Scripture is in John 15, where we hear Jesus talk about abiding in God's love and inviting his disciples to abide in his love.

By the way, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, located near the end of our New Testament were for many years attributed to the writer of John's Gospel, who was likely John the beloved disciple. Now a days, New Testament scholars rarely assume that they know definitively who an author is in the Bible, but what they do seem to agree on is that both John's Gospel and 1, 2nd, and 3rd John connect to an early Christian community that found inspiration from the disciple John. Also, you may remember from earlier sermons, that in Celtic Christianity there is a special connection to the disciple John and to John's Gospel for its emphasis on the spiritual and relational nature of Jesus and his emphasis on love for the disciples.

I consider myself a Celtic Christian both in terms of my ethnic heritage. My ancestors were Scots Irish and I also have some English heritage from my mom's side. I am from Celtic lands. But I also spiritually feel a deep connection to Celtic Spirituality because I love the emphasis on God being revealed through nature and through an image of God as love, personified specifically in the person of Jesus.

Friends, there are many ways to image God and there are 66 books in the Bible that we encourage you to read, not to mention the apocrypha. But as you read the whole of Scripture, I want to help you connect to God in a personal way. Many people live their whole lives either without a tangible relationship with God that they are aware of or with an image of God that is quite distant and even scary.

Although, each person relates to God in a very personal way, I do think Jesus wanted his followers, his disciples to relate to him and his Father in a very specific way. In our passage today, Jesus says it plainly. He calls his disciples friends. He even tells the disciples that they are no longer in his mind servants. No, they are his friends because they know what Jesus has learned from his father in Heaven.

I believe Jesus has a plan for each one of his followers. His goal is to cultivate a friendship with each one of us.

Think for a moment about the word friend. A friend is a safe person in your life. Good friends love you well. Friends are the people you may confide in and share both your joys and your struggles. A friend is approachable and listens well. You can share your dreams with your friends and also your anxieties about the present and the future. A friend is not quick to judge you but a friend sometimes helps you stay accountable to your goals. Sometimes a friend might need to give you counsel or guidance but always with a good spirit. Now, I understand that our friends are not perfect and do not always come through the way we wish, just as we are not always perfect friends to one another, but what I am reflecting on are the ideals associated with friendship.

When Jesus calls his disciples friends, he is giving them the greatest compliment and also a powerful invitation. He wants them to know that they are deeply loved by him and the father. They are special to him. Jesus also wants them to find their source of life by abiding in his love just as he abides in the love of his father. He encourages them to follow the commandments not because Jesus is concerned about following rules for rules sake, but because following the commandments, especially the commandment to love one another, leads to life and joy.

The invitation Jesus gives is to love one another and to be willing to demonstrate sacrificial love. Sometime sacrificial love even involves giving up one's life for another. Jesus ultimately shows his own love for the disciples and us by giving up his life on the cross. All of the disciples except John will eventually give up their lives for their faith and John will be exiled for his faith.

Jesus has a purpose in his friendship with the first disciples and with us. The purpose is to offer us love and friendship and then for us to extend love and friendship to others.

I mentioned last week that I spent part of my sabbatical visiting Spokane, WA and going to Camp Spalding where I worked for four summers in college. I shared with you that the same camp I worked at 30 years ago, still focuses on inviting children, youth, and adults to develop a personal relationship with Jesus. I still remember when I used to counsel for different cabins. Each evening after the speaker spoke to us during campfire time, we would discuss specific questions. The kids would be given opportunities to talk about their faith in God and then on Friday night, youth would be invited to receive Christ as their friend and as their Lord and Savior.

Sometimes camps are the places where we intentionally invite people to accept Christ, but I think regular church gatherings and worship services are also great opportunities to recommit to our friendship with Jesus. As we begin the fall season, I encourage each and every one of us to say a simple prayer to Jesus. Here is what I suggest. I will pray for us and you can join with your hearts if you wish.

“Jesus, thank you for being my friend. Help me to make our friendship the center of my life. Please help me to receive your love and give me the ability to show love to others. Help me to especially care for my family members, friends, and those who feel least loved in my community.” In Jesus’ Name AMEN.

Later this morning we will honor the first responders in our community at our Pie Social. Firefighters, police officers, EMT’s, paramedics, mental health counselors and others serve as first responders. They choose daily to put others before themselves. They choose to be friends to strangers.

One powerful example of the importance of first responders that was in the news on Monday, involved the wide receiver of the San Francisco 49er’s football team, Ricky Pearsol. Pearsol sadly was shot a few weeks ago due to encountering a robber in a public setting. Thankfully, two female first responders were able to arrive and help Pearsol receive the medical attention needed to save his life. On Monday Night football’s telecast earlier this week, Pearsol brought the two responders who saved his life onto the football field for everyone to cheer. He is healing well and these two women will likely remain his friend for years to come.

This time of year is also when we especially remember the first responders who helped save many lives after the 9/11 attack on the twin towers in New York and the Pentagon. We remember Jesus’ words in John 15 verse 13 “Greater love has no one than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Many first responders on 9/11 gave their lives or later experienced health issues as a result of sacrificing themselves to show love to others.

I hope this morning we may remember Jesus’ gift of friendship and his example of sacrificial love as we are inspired by those who show sacrificial love every day.

Remember that Jesus more than anything wants you to know that you are his friend and that he has chosen you to go and bear the fruit of love in this world.

Please pray with me...

John 15:9-16

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

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[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.