

Prayer of the Day:

Father of lights, every good and perfect gift comes from you. Inspire us to think those things that are true and long for those things that are good, that we may always make our petitions according to your gracious will; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Alleluia. (John 14:23 cf. NIV)

Sermon Text:

Friendship, it has been said that friendship is on the decline in our world today. While we are ever more connected electronically it would seem that we become ever more disconnected physically. Loneliness is more and more identified as a problem in our society, even though moms and dads are shoulder to shoulder at more sporting events than they can sometimes count, we are not connecting.

Add to that a possible growing misunderstanding of what friends really are and the problem widens. Friends are the thick and thin, "I've seen you at your worst and I'm still here" kind of relationships. They're built on the "I didn't think anyone else thought that but then you seemed to understand so perfectly" kind of moments which build them up. These are not simply acquaintance's or the people I work with although they can sometimes be one and the same. No, these relationships take time. It takes real time to get to know people like that. So perhaps our busyness might be to blame. We can't even be expected to read a few lines of text anymore because we've gotten used to the quick snippets of twitter and snapchat. It's kind of hard to make friends when conversations are limited to 140 characters, well 280 now, see even twitter figured it took a bit more time.

So as one author put it we are in a strange world where "we can be alone in a crowded room." In fact in a world where we friend people on Facebook and thrive on the popularity of our posts, we are increasingly alone. Isn't it interesting then that Jesus would look out at all of us and announce, *"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have*

Text: John 15:9-17

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other. (NIV84)

made known to you.” Yes, Jesus is giving us **TRUE FRIENDSHIP. IT IS COMPLETELY SUPPLIED BY CHRIST, THAT WE MIGHT BE FRIENDLY IN THIS WORLD.**

The author C.S. Lewis once described friendship as two people standing shoulder to shoulder as they walk through life. In this regard, friends don't see each other as needy, superior, or in any other way than equals with equal interest in some facet of life which draws them into their friendship.

That poses a big problem for us. You see there is absolutely nothing that would allow us to consider ourselves equals with God. Standing shoulder to shoulder with Him requires the impossible from us. Jesus Himself tells us what friendship with God requires in Matthew 5:48, *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

Far from perfect, our natural state in this world is even farther from friendship. Paul tells the Romans, *“the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. (Romans 8:7-8)”* Open hostility toward God is the natural condition of man, not friends we are the exact opposite. We are enemies of God.

So Jesus tells us our friendship must be different. *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.* When we were openly hostile, God did all the work. He chooses us. He makes the decision to befriend us in spite of our inadequacy, annoying behavior and open animosity.

But how does one defeat the hostility of sinful man in the face of perfection without wiping out humanity? As always, Jesus has the answer. *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.”* ... *“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”* So Paul tells the Romans, *For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life (Romans 5:10)!*

This is the message of reconciliation. While we were, sinners, enemies of God, He chose us and sent His Son to make us friends. Jesus came into this world that he might be the equal of God in flesh. He provides the perfect holy life which God demands of those He would call friends. He goes to the cross to erase the animosity which we have shown for God and His holy will. His resurrection is the official declaration that God has accepted the sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf and we are now friends of God and partakes of the eternal benefits of that relationship with Him. While earthly friendship is exactly what C.S. Lewis describes, our friendship with God is completely supplied by Him, His love displayed in our lives for us.

Of course that means something to us. When such love is displayed it begins to change the way that we interact with God even with one another as friends of God. Listen again to the lesson as a whole. ⁹ *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear*

fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Friends listen to one another. They are not hostile but loving as they interact with each other. They want the best for each other. So our God directs us to His law. Not because we have to earn our friendship with Him, but because He wants that relationship to grow stronger as we live out that love every day. It's interesting that Jesus would boil down the commandments of God to two statements. Note the driving force in the verb He uses there. “ ‘*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*’ *This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.* (Matthew 22:37-40)”

Friendship thrives on love. So God directs us to love Him and to love others. And that happens as we focus in on all that Jesus has made known to us. That's the revealed Word of God or the Bible. He has given it that we might live in the friendship He has given us and that we might live as friends with one another.

C.S. Lewis, in his book the Four Loves, writes something interesting about friendship. He says friendship is unique in that unlike Passion which is meant for only two people, friendship is meant to be shared with many. He says that when we have many friends who are in turn friends with one another an interesting thing happens, our knowledge of each other deepens through the friendships that we have with others and how we react to them.

So it is in this friendship as well. As we tell others of God, love them as He loved us, our friends will in turn deepen our understanding of God as they focus on the Word and some aspect we maybe haven't previously considered our understood is brought out by them. As we surround ourselves with our fellow believers they then help us when we are trapped by a particular sin or face hardship and struggle. Then as we direct each other back to our God, His Word and His sacraments, well Jesus says it, *If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love.* Again our interaction in the church, with one another, for one another is important. We have all been made friends through Christ. So dear friends, *Love each other.*

If real friendship is dying as some would tell us, then our world is all the poorer for it. Loneliness is debilitating for a people who thrive on relationships. Thankfully for the Christian this is never a reality. Today, Jesus reminds us that He is our friend even as He speaks of **TRUE FRIENDSHIP. IT IS COMPLETELY SUPPLIED BY CHRIST, THAT WE MIGHT BE FRIENDLY IN THIS WORLD.** Amen.