

May 5, 2024
Easter 6
Who's Your Friend?
Acts 10:44-48
Psalm 98
1 John 5:1-6
John 15:9-17
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Fellow ministers of the gospel of the risen Christ.
Gracia y paz del dios, Padre, Hijo e Espiritu Santo.
Grace to you and peace from God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Apple Core!

Baltimore!

Who's your friend?

Sheila!

We grew up in the country, rural Clackamas County, near Mulino. The property my parents rented from a church family was 62 acres of woods, a holly orchard, a fruit orchard of 40+ various fruit trees and a large, plowed field suitable for growing lots of vegetables.

There was no scarcity of fruits and vegetables to "chuck" at each other using that call-and-response game. Remember how it works? One kid says "apple core", the second kid responds "Baltimore", the first kid asks "who's your friend" and kid #2 chooses a third kid. The first kid then "chucks" the "apple core" at the third kid.

I never quite understood why a "friend" would chuck an apple core, or tomato or peach, or anything, for that matter at a "friend". It was clear that this was not the way to treat friends.

How do you treat your friends? How do you expand your circle of friends to include new friends?

These weeks after Easter we have been hearing texts from the gospel according to John about friends. We've heard them so many times, we can almost recite them from memory, like the dialogue of a favorite movie.

The risen Christ appears to his friends in the locked room Christ is the Good Shepherd tending to his friends. Christ is the vine to which God grafts us as branches.

Today we hear Jesus directly call us his friends, not servants, friends.

Friendship can be difficult to define and more difficult to cultivate. We can fall into a habit of using the term *friend* quite casually.

“I have a friend who _____”. “My friend said _____”. My friend did this, my friend did that... And, I’m afraid we sometimes *treat* our friends just as casually.

Jesus has something important to say about friendship, love and joy today. “If you keep my commandments”, Jesus says, “you will abide in my love”.

This is NOT your typically conditional if/then proposition, It is not dependent on *our ability* to keep the commandments.

Jesus makes friendship a statement of fact. What he means here is this: “If you keep the commandments I have taught you... and I know you will, you will abide in the same love with God that I do”.

This is a love that transcends emotion. This is a love that is relational, not transactional. It is a love that brings deep joy, not just happiness or contentment, but deep joy.

It is a love that cannot be constrained but catapults us outward to care for the marginalized, the hungry, the unhoused, the immigrant... just as Jesus cared for those on the perimeter of society.

This is the new commandment from Jesus: love one another. Not just the few in our inner circle, EVERYONE! That’s hard! And VERY different from our logic-driven idea of friendship.

We choose friends, we lose friends, we have friends for a season, we have friends for a reason, friends for a short time, friends for a long time.

But the title of *Friend* takes on a whole new meaning in light of Jesus’ words. Jesus offers us friendship that is so different, we have a hard time understanding it. Jesus says, “You did not choose *me*”. Jesus says, “I *chose* you...as a friend”. This is no casual acquaintance. No longer a servant...a friend! And a friend “lays down their life for their friends”. Have we considered what Jesus means by that?

Jesus laid down—literally set aside—his life sitting at the throne of God, to become a human being. He experienced hunger, thirst, weariness, joy, sorrow, frustration, all the human experiences and emotions that we know all too well.

Jesus gave up his privilege as the only Son of God to repair the relationship between the creature and the Creator. By his example, we see what it means to “lay down your life for your friends”.

Yes, Jesus gave up his human life, was tortured, crucified, died and was buried. But, have we considered, fully what Jesus is asking of us in this text? “Greater love has no one than this, but that they lay down their life for their friends”.

Consider how very comfortable your life is. Mine is pretty easy: I have all that I need, all that I want...and more! Am I willing to lay that aside for the benefit of my friends? Wait! Who are my friends?

This text brings us to an inflection point in our discipleship. What am I willing to lay down? For whom am I willing to lay that all down so that another beloved child of God can live more fully?

Fellow ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ...let’s rethink that childhood game, “Apple Core/Baltimore”.... Instead of chucking an apple core with the intent to injure, who needs you to call them “friend” and toss them a *life-saving* “apple core”?

Who needs an apple core tossed their direction because they are hungry? Who needs an apple core tossed their direction because they are houseless? Who needs an apple core tossed their direction because the color of their skin puts them in danger daily? Who needs an apple core tossed their direction because they face danger based on who they love? Who needs an apple core tossed their direction because they are grieving, weary, depressed, ill...and don’t know how to climb out of their depth of despair?

What would it look like if we expanded our welcome at God’s table? What would it look like if, one day a dozen or a hundred new friends come to this font to be baptized?

What would it look like if a dozen or a hundred new friends on fire with the Holy Spirit, in love with God, infused with joy for doing God’s will disrupted this “classroom”?

Sound impossible? With God, nothing is impossible.

If the growth of the church depended solely on our actions and ideas, the church would have disappeared centuries ago.

It is the power of God through the Holy Spirit that creates and re-creates the church. It is God, through Jesus Christ who maintains, nurtures, increases our faith to share this ridiculous Good News of Jesus Christ.

If we follow Jesus' commandment to love one another, even the alien and the stranger, the queer and the lame...if we listen to the Holy Spirit, she will lead us, just as she led Peter to baptize and accept the Gentiles, then, we will be friends of Jesus and we will find the deep joy that comes from God through Jesus.

Thanks be to God.

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