

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
“Jesus’ loving hand of friendship” John 15:15-17  
May 5, 2024  
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter is from our Gospel reading, John 15:15-17.

**“<sup>15</sup>No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. <sup>17</sup>These things I command you, that you love one another.”**

So far the text...

Who are you friends with? When I ask you that question what does your mind begin to do? Do you begin to picture people’s faces or fondly remember shared experiences with those that you would call your friends? How long is the list of your friends? How do you consider someone to be your friend?

Yes, we’re going to focus on friendship today in the Biblical sense. If you use Snapchat or Facebook or other social media platforms, maybe you’ve been conditioned to categorize different lists of friends. For example, on Snapchat, I’ve read, because I’ve never actually used this, that if there is a yellow heart symbol next to your friend, that means that person is the person you have the most interaction with ...your #1 best friend. You send the most snaps to and receive the most snaps from, that is texts, pictures and videos. If it’s a red heart, that means you’ve been #1 best friends for 2 weeks. If it’s a pink heart, then it’s been two months of being #1 best friends.

Facebook? Again, I’m not a Facebook user so if you’ve sent me friend requests, don’t feel bad that I haven’t answered them. Well, in Facebook, friendship is categorized by levels once again. Your friends are either, “close friends”, “acquaintances” or “restricted” according to how much you want to share of your personal life and know of others personal lives.

The word “friend” as Jesus calls His disciples is much more profound, weighty, and life changing. Jesus doesn’t throw the word “friend” around indiscriminately. To be called a friend of Jesus is the highest joy, honor, privilege that a person can have! There are no levels of friendship with Jesus. Either you are a friend of His or you’re not. And what makes this

friendship so special and so precious is given to us in our Gospel reading from John 15. First, it's precious because Jesus chooses you. Second, because He reveals to you the most intimate and secret knowledge of Himself and His mission that involves you. And third, Jesus gives you the joy of responding to His friendship with the love He has first shown you. And...also responding to His circle of friends, other believers, with the same enduring fruit of love.

So, first of all, you are chosen to be Jesus' friend. Jesus makes this very clear when He says **"You did not choose Me, but I chose you.."** It is popular to hear of "decision theology" in churches. "You have to make a choice to be a follower of Jesus. No, all people are incapable of choosing Jesus. How could a sinner offer his or her unclean hand of friendship to the almighty, holy and righteous God?

As we learned in the meaning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> article of the Apostles Creed, when we say "I believe in Jesus Christ" this is only by the power of the Holy Spirit. As Luther explained,

*"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith;"*

This friendship with Jesus is graciously given to you. And not only that, your circle of Christian friends is also chosen for you! It's the whole Christian Church. How did Jesus choose you to be His friend? You don't have to check on Snapchat, or any social media to see if you're friends. You look to your baptism! That is when the Holy Spirit called you by the Gospel forgave you all your sins and called you friend. Yes, Jesus is a Friend of sinners. He is your Friend and mine because He has sanctified you and me by the power of the Gospel.

That's what we heard last week in the opening verses of John 15 with the illustration of the Vine and the branches. We heard of this intimate connection that the believer is graciously given. Jesus declared **"You are already clean..."** How? Because you come to God sinless? No... You are clean by the fruit that you have born? No... What does Jesus say? **"because of the word which I have spoken to you."** The Gospel! The life-giving nutrients of forgiveness and life that continually flow from the Vine to the branches, to Jesus' friends.

And as Luther said, we are "kept in the true faith" in this amazing friendship of Jesus' love. How? Through the powerful Word of truth and the Lord's Supper which we receive today. The very body and blood of Jesus that forged this friendship by paying for the world's sins on the cross, He gives you personally for your forgiveness. For we sin much and would break off this friendship if it were not for Jesus' continual restoration of His forgiveness given to you in this Supper. Jesus speaks these very words of friendship on the very night that He instituted the

Lord's Supper so that His friends, who would abandon Him when He was arrested, would continually receive forgiveness in the breaking of the bread.

What Jesus did to make us friends was nothing short than laying down His life for us. No greater love is this than to lay one's life down for His friends. And that is what Jesus did for you.

And that brings us to the second reason why your friendship with Jesus is so precious...He keeps no secrets from you. Jesus has made known to you all that is needed to believe in Him in who He is, the incarnate Son of God, the Messiah, your Lord and Savior, and what He has done...His mission of coming to this world to give His life, raise it again, ascend into heaven, send the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and promise to come back again.

As Jesus told His now believing friends, including Thomas, after His resurrection:

**“30 And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”**

Life, now and eternally is what Jesus gives you, His friend, through faith in Him.

And now thirdly, what makes this friendship with Jesus so precious and meaningful? Because Jesus gives you the power by the Holy Spirit to abide, remain in Him and bear much fruit! It's a joyful two-way friendship. As you have been loved, you are commanded to 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. 11 “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”**

The word that Jesus uses here “commands” includes not just the law of the 10 commandments, but the whole of Scripture which He has made known to you – most importantly, His Gospel of salvation. Jesus gives you much joy as you show love to Him and one another. Joy in acting in love, bearing each others' burdens, encouraging one another with the Gospel, praying for one another, in short, a willingness to lay down your life for each other!

**“Love each other as I have loved you.”**

*“He loved me in all my misery. I must love fellow Christians in all their misery. His love covered all my sin. My love must cover the sins of fellow Christians.”*

Indeed, God has chosen your friends for you. Look around you. You take the Lord's Supper together for as you have been called into the true faith, God has also called your fellow believer. In the highest sense, the Biblical sense, you are friends in this communion of saints because of the friendship that God has given you.

This friendship gets the highest level of "hearts" that can be given for it is based on Jesus' true love. And it is eternal. He elected you to be His friend even before the foundations of the world!

I'll close with Paul's description of this amazing relationship of Jesus with His friends, His believers which Paul speaks to the friends of Christ in Ephesus and are spoken to each of you believers in Christ as well.

**"11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, 12 that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory."**

Who are you friends with? Thanks be to God! With Jesus! And with other believers, who have also obtained our inheritance through faith! To the praise of His glory! And with Peter we share the Good News, **"through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins."** And new friendships with Jesus and fellow believers are made by the power of the Gospel according to God's great mercy!

Amen.

**"And this peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**