

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 14  
REJOICING IN BEING LOVED BY JESUS AS HIS FRIEND

*"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant 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."* (John 15.12-15)

Chapters 14-17 of John's Gospel serve as Jesus' farewell narrative to his disciples. They are together, enjoying a meal, a frequent experience, even in Jerusalem, the city where Jesus is frequently found in this Gospel.

Jesus has washed the feet of his disciples. In the wake of this act of intimate servanthood, he reminds them of what he has taught them, speaking to the primacy of love, an important topic for John. Jesus reminds his listeners of the ultimate act of love, of dying for another, another act of love he will soon embody.

This week I invite you to rejoice in being loved by Jesus as his friend...

REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 15  
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*"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."* (John 15.12).

*"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you"*. This is one of the fifty times when John uses the word "love" as a verb. The intentionality here of Jesus is that, as he prepares to depart, to die on the cross, he is thinking of others.

What do you imagine will be your last reflection with your loved ones? Would it be something similar to this? Have you ever made and taken the time to share with your loved ones how much you love them? If so, what did you say? If not, when might you make and take the time to do so?

It's like writing your obituary, only more personal, because you are addressing "the personal "other" rather than the general "others". What "last will and testament" would you choose to share with those whom you love, those whom you are loved by? What about love, what would you share about love?

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 16  
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*"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."* (John 15.13).

Jesus also shares, *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."* (John 15.13). Now, this is probably easier for Jesus to not only say, but to practice than it is for us. After all, in submitting to the cross, he did lay down his life, for his friends as well as for the world. What's he saying?

How? How would/could we do that? Are we to look for an opportunity to "lay down our life" for a friend? If we did, how would we know what would be the time that would be most useful? what would such an opportunity look like, after all?

Do you think John (who is, after all, sharing this message with his listeners, including us) understood this as a metaphor? That we are to look for opportunities to share life so deeply that we take the other into account as equally, as freely, as we do ourselves?

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 17  
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*"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."* (John 15.13).

In Luke, Jesus is quoted as saying: "if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves" (9.23-25)?

Here in John, Jesus testifies to his willingness to lay down-to give up-his life for his friends, to practice what he preaches. He demonstrates with his way as well as his words the importance of self-emptying as an ultimate expression of loving.

Jesus speaks directly to his disciples in speaking of friends. They are not subjects; they are fellow witnesses to God's Way in the world, a Way that is paradoxical in that it is in emptying one's self that one is filled, how in embracing others one is embraced by God.

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 18  
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"*You are my friends if you do what I command you.*" (John 15.14). How does this strike your ear? How does the use of the word "if" sound to you, sit within you? It could be read and understood as quid-pro-quo, that our being friends with Jesus is dependent upon condition, the condition of doing what Jesus commanded.

In John there is only one command that Jesus is recorded as sharing, the one that begins the text we're reflecting on and rejoicing in this week: "*This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*" Perhaps that contains the clue to understanding what Jesus has gone on to say.

"If" can also mean "since." Does reading the text as "*You are my friends since you do what I command you,*" help you to understand how instead of a challenge it reflects Jesus' confidence that the disciples (and us, as modern disciples) would do what he had commanded them to do, to love one another in the same way Jesus had loved them?

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 19  
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"*You are my friends if you do what I command you.*" (John 15.14). I've suggested the choice of understanding the "if" as "since". In addition to potentially eliminating a potential condition, is there any other advantage?

If there is trust on Jesus' behalf with his closest confidants, those who had witnessed his public ministry, this is something essential for relationships, including friendships. The command to love one another as Jesus has loved them was originally addressed to the disciples, and then through John to second and third generation disciples of Jesus and eventually to us moderns.

Uniquely, this is John's take on the Great Commandment that is found elsewhere: to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. It connects with the last phrase. Jesus invites us to love God, yes, and to love ourselves, and to love each other. We cannot love God and neighbor without loving ourselves. And the good news—the Gospel—is that Jesus trusts us to do so as his friends.

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REJOICING IN THE SEASON OF EASTER, 2023: MAY 20  
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*"I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant 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." (John 15.15)*

Jesus extends this trust to his disciples, and specifically shares why he is now calling them friends rather than servants, because he has been fully transparent in sharing what he knows of and from God. Jesus has not assigned tasks to be accomplished in God's name, he has embodied God's mission in such a way that the disciples could understand Jesus' purpose.

Jesus has invited his closest confidants into the circle of compassion and caring so that they could give eyewitness reports to what they had experienced, eyewitness reports that provided the stories that became the Gospels, John's included.

This is love, love as a verb, the expression that occurs fifty times in John. Jesus has loved those whom God had provided him with, and out of the common call created uncommon experiences.

Thank you for rejoicing with me this week in being loved by Jesus as his friend...