

“We Really Do Need Each Other.” – October 22, 2017
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St. John 15:9-17

If you ask people in America what is wrong with the church today, you will receive various diverse answers. Cynicism has become a favorite sport in America. If you look, you can always find something wrong with everything or everyone.

A farmer’s neighbor was negative about absolutely everything. The farmer purchased a new tractor and the neighbor said it would break down soon. The farmer bought a piece of equipment for the tractor, and the neighbor said it would rust. This continued day after day, as nauseam.

The farmer vowed to do something to encourage this old sour puss, so he bought a pedigreed hunting dog, and secretly trained him to retrieve by walking on water instead of swimming.

At the beginning of hunting season, the farmer invited his negative neighbor to hunt with him. They shot several ducks together. The farmer shouted to his dog, “Fetch!” The dog sprinted, his paws barely skimming the surface of the water, scooped up four ducks and was back in seconds, dry as donkey dust.

“How about THAT?” asked the farmer. The neighbor remarked, “Can’t swim, can he?”

Jesus loved to teach metaphorically. And, in these “Upper Room Discourses” in St. John chapters 13-17, the apostle shows Jesus comparing our relationship with God as ‘friendship.’ Please note verse 15 again: “*I do not call you servants any longer . . . I have called you friends.*” The cosmic Christ, Creator of all, calls us friends. We are, as our Quaker sisters and brothers say, ‘*a society of friends brought together by the love which Jesus has for each of us.*’ We are called friends by the grace of God.

In the interval between the Resurrection and the Ascension, Jesus gives the disciples his vision for his followers' life together. The concept that runs through this image, is the love that unites Jesus and his Father, now connects him with the disciples, and the disciples with each other.

"I call you friends." By doing so Jesus changes our name, our story, and our identification. It is not something we choose but a gift God gives to us. Formerly, we may have been daughters or sons, wives or husbands, democrats or republicans, but now we are God's friends. Again, by the grace of God, we have become a part of God's family and the church's story. *"I have called you friends."*

A beautiful result regarding life in the church, is the more we live intimately with Jesus, the friendlier we become with our sisters and brothers. As someone once said, *'Some of Jesus' friends are strange.'* I resemble that!

Usually, we think our friends are those we choose because of similar likes or dislikes. Jesus however, reminds us *"You did not choose me, but I chose you."* (v.16) Remember, the disciples are a band of fragmented and improbable candidates, whose life together became established by their friendship with Jesus.

After the Day of Pentecost, these friends of Jesus became the representatives of the revolutionary, selfless love we see in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Being a friend of God means that we are chosen by love, not because of anything we have done, but solely on the the invitation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Our relationship with God through Jesus enables us to make friends of strangers.

There are tremendous benefits of friendship with God. With these come breathtaking responsibilities, too. An enormous one is to love everyone. *Love is not optional.* It is the lifestyle of friends and lovers of God. And, friendship is not primarily about feelings. Rather, it is concerned with our willingness to be obedient to Jesus' command to love one another. To place other's needs before our own.

If we need an interpretation of what that means, we need only to look at the crucifixion of Jesus.

I believe it was Mark Twain who first said, *“It is not the things in the Bible that I don’t understand that bother me, but the things that I do.”*

Sometimes, we get caught up in the false idea that we have to ‘like a person’ before we can ‘love them.’ Just recall that God loved us while we unlovable. While we are yet sinners, Jesus died for us, and made we who were strangers into friends.

The Gospel is always a radical, revolutionary ride. The world system has cries, *“Build walls! Keep people who are different away from us!”* Jesus says, *“Welcome the different and make strangers our friends.”* The world system says, *“Kill your enemies!”* Jesus says, *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”* (St. Matthew 5:44). The world says, *“Only certain kinds of people can be our friends.”* But, St. Paul tells us *“there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, . . . male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”*

What an incredibly beautiful gift we have been given . . . friendship with God and each other. Our vision then, is to make friends of all who are lonely and friendless, those who are lost. The church has been called to point to the Kingdom of God, where everyone is invited to sit at the table, and share the love in the name of the One who calls all His friends. Who are Your friends? Alleluia. Amen.