

Friends, not Slaves

King of Glory Lutheran Church

May 4-5, 2024

Year B: 6th Sunday of Easter: John 15:9-17

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As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. ¹²This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I 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. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Jesus says a radical thing...I call you friends. Is that helpful for you? If your image of God is not helpful, or old and rusty, or precluding you from intimacy with the One who chooses you, rest in the promise God has chosen you, holds you, loves you and calls you friend. Let this bring you joy!

Christ is Risen and alive in our midst! Amen.

What is your image of God? If you could chose an image or color for God what would it be?

Our earliest images of God imbed themselves into our spirits when we are thinking at very concrete stages brain development. As we grow older, our brains can play with a variety of metaphors about who God is. Unfortunately, many times negative images of God are derived from an early negative life experience. God becomes like a harmful parent, or the embodiment of our anger at some loss, or that judge in the sky who is always shaking a finger in our general direction.

Jesus says something very radical in our lesson for today. We hear Him say to His disciples, "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."

To be a slave in scripture was a title of honor. Moses was a slave to God, as was Joshua and David. One was to be proud to be called a slave of God.

Likewise, remember in Jesus' day, slaves did the most menial tasks. They were not to be seen. They were not equal in power to their masters; doing what was asked of them without question and without delay. Their lives were owned by another. The Greek law defined slaves as 'a living tool.' Slaves were a common and natural part of life.

Perhaps its challenging for us, then to hear the radical nature of Jesus' comment when He says, now you are my "friends." You are my friends.

Abraham was named a 'friend of God.' In Roman Emperors' courts, there were a very select group of men called, 'the friends of the king.' These men had access to the king at any time of night or day. They were truly in the inner circle. (pg 208)

Take a moment and think about your friends. We all have friends. For those who live as single, friends can become family. And for those who live as married, your partner may be your best friend, but you have friends outside your spouse also.

Our friends are the people we speak freely to; one whom you feel really comfortable with. They are equals and there is a mutuality between us. One doesn't serve the other, like a slave, but out of love for the other. We've been learning about this in the "Spiritual Friendship" class on Sundays.

Our friends make us feel like our dogs whose bodies simply wriggle in perfect joy when we walk in. We get excited, we have profound joy in the presence of our deep friends. We look forward to being with them.

Jesus says, 'I call you friends.' This shift represents a change in Jesus' relationship with the disciples. Before now, they have been learners and followers. Now, through love, Jesus intentionally changes the relationship. Jesus and God the Father have shared all things during Jesus' life. Now, Jesus says, I'll have the same kind of relationship with you.

As friends of God, we too, have access to God night and day. If God asks us to do something, we can ask 'why?' We don't have a blind obedience. Jesus has shared with the disciples and with us, all His reasons for carrying on ministry. Jesus has shared His heart, His plans, His hopes and dreams and warnings for what being a follower of God will look like.

Is the term 'friend' helpful for you? Does it invite companionship and comfort? Does it invoke an intimacy that allows you to open your heart and share with God in ways that the terms of 'Lord' or 'King' don't? When you think of God being friend, does it feel like the partnership Jesus is allowing us to now have?

Perhaps 'friend' isn't helpful for you. Perhaps it feels too casual for God Almighty. Does it invoke an intimacy that doesn't seem appropriate for God who forgives sins and creates every living creature?

In the Greco-Roman world friendships could involve political or military alliances. Patron-client friendships were unequal. But the ideals of friendship included loyalty, equality and mutual sharing, an intimacy of conversation about every topic.

This is the sense Jesus is speaking of. The love Jesus has for these faithful men and women who followed Him is deep. He has shared with them His thoughts and life for the last three years. Now the cross is just out ahead of Him. He will lay down His life for His friends. He will do this out of Love.

You will be my friends, for I 'chose you.' Let's not miss this emphasis. God chose the 12 disciples. They did not chose their rabbi. Jesus chose them.

God chooses us. God chooses us first. God chooses us always. God chooses us. Period.

Remember back in elementary and junior high being chosen or not chosen for teams? Or to go to the dance? To be included to play at recess? In a time when our identity was being formed - at times like a bubbling volcano right under the surface - it could be painful when we were chosen or not.

When I was in sixth grade, a popular game on recess was dodge-ball. I was always last to be chosen. I remember one particular day, that the two most popular boys were team captains. It was down to the last few students, mostly girls. When I was chosen, there was an audible groan from my new team-mates. Then within the first 30 seconds, I saw the ball flying towards me and it stung as it hit. But what hurt more was the cheers from the opposing team. "Out!"

We Lutherans take this choosing very seriously. We believe we don't get chosen by God on our own merits. "God, I'm good at dodge-ball!" We don't somehow

make it up to God (pointing heavenward). The direction is always this way (pointing downward) God chooses us! Grace! You don't have to be good at dodge-ball.

Jesus has already chosen you. And you. And you. And you, and you. Jesus already holds you, loves you and calls you friend. Period.

Let's end where we began. *If your current image of God is not helpful, or old and rusty, or precluding you from intimacy with the One who chooses you, rest in the promise God has chosen you, holds you, loves you and calls you friend. Let this bring you joy!*
Amen!