

“I Call You Friends...”

Psalm 98

John 15: 9-17

May 17, 2009

United Memorial

Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

How many of you would consider yourself blessed by your friends?

What are some of the characteristics of friendship?

Respect... Trust... Loyalty... Love... Sacrifice... Fun... Shared experiences?

Probably more than this...

When does a stranger become a friend?

How does a stranger become a friend?

One dictionary defined friend as: attached to another by affection or esteem... a favoured companion... or a member of a religious organization called the Society of Friends, they are more commonly known as Quakers.

In my last pastoral charge, I had a couple of friends who I was called the Gardening Guerillas...

One evening, as I was on the phone, I heard something going on outside the manse.

After I finished my conversation I got up to take a look and there were my music director and another member of the congregation, planting ground cover along the side of my driveway...

Then a few days later, they were over again... weeding, raking, generously sharing not only their wisdom and knowledge but also their hands and feet!

As I mowed the huge lawn later that day, the thought that popped into my head was that friends are like weeds...

Now perhaps many of you wouldn't like to have friendship be compared to a weed...

But think about it... weeds are tough... prolific and almost impossible to root out...

Would that all our friendships were like that...

Today's gospel reading marks an important transition from the passages we have read over the last few weeks... we had Jesus as shepherd and us as the sheep

We had Jesus as the true vine... and us as the branches...

This week, we have Jesus calling his disciples friends...

Calling them into a relationship of equals...

He tells the disciples that he has given them all the knowledge that God had given him... and that now they were to go and bear fruit...

He is once again preparing them for his leave taking... not on a cross this time, but in his ascension.

They are to align themselves with God... as Jesus aligned himself with God...

They are to love one another... as he loved them... they are to be joyful and their joy will be complete...

Those words are written for us as well...

We are called into a relationship of equals with Jesus...

We have been given all the knowledge that God had given him... and we are now to go and bear fruit...

We are to love one another... as he loved us...

We are to align ourselves with God... just as Jesus aligned himself with God...

We are to be joyful and our joy will be complete...

Many of you remember Margaret MacLennan, I am told that she had an wonderful way of welcoming people... the ministry of hospitality...

Margaret has not been well in my time here... and instead of welcoming people to worship, she is housebound.

But... she is not forgotten... she extended friendship to so many people... and now, through the folks on the pastoral care team and others who care about her, Jesus' love and friendship are extended to her.

This is friendship... and ministry... Mary, who was extended friendship and care, is now on the receiving end of it...

Many of us were taught that we should be self sufficient, and we find it difficult to be on the receiving end... but that is what friendship is about out... there is a reciprocity involved...

And the spiral continues...

Like most people with email and internet, I get a lot of junk mail, dubious requests and unbelievable stories that I simply delete.

Occasionally one comes along that I think is worthwhile and this is one of them.

It is supposed to have been written by a Hospice of Metro Denver physician and it is entitled "Friends are God's way of taking care of us."

I just had one of the most amazing experiences of my life, and wanted to share it with my family and dearest friends:

I was driving home from a meeting this evening about 5, stuck in traffic on Colorado Blvd., and the car started to choke and splutter and die...

I barely managed to coast, cursing, into a gas station, glad only that I would not be blocking traffic and would have a somewhat warm spot to wait for the tow truck.

I could make the call, I saw a woman walking out of the "quickie mart" building, and it looked like she slipped on some ice and fell into a Gas pump, so I got out to see if she was okay.

When I got there, it looked more like she had been overcome by sobs than that she had fallen; she was a young woman who looked really haggard with dark circles under her eyes.

She dropped something as I helped her up, and I picked it up to give it to her. It was a nickel.

At that moment, everything came into focus for me: the crying woman, the ancient Suburban crammed full of stuff with 3 kids in the back (1 in a car seat), and the gas pump reading \$4.95.

I asked her if she was okay and if she needed help, and she just kept saying "I don't want my kids to see me crying," so we stood on the other side of the pump from her car.

She said she was driving to California and that things were very hard for her right now.

So I asked, "And you were praying?"

That made her back away from me a little, but I assured her I was not a crazy person and said, "He heard you, and He sent me."

I took out my card and swiped it through the card reader on the pump so she could fill up her car completely, and while it was fuelling, walked to the next door McDonald's and bought 2 big bags of food, some gift certificates for more, and a big cup of coffee.

She gave the food to the kids in the car, who attacked it like wolves, and we stood by the pump eating fries and talking a little.

She told me her name, and that she lived in Kansas City.

Her boyfriend left 2 months ago and she had not been able to make ends meet. She knew she wouldn't have money to pay the rent the next month and finally in desperation had called her parents, with whom she had not spoken in about 5 years.

They lived in California and said she could come live with them and try to get on her feet there. So she packed up everything she owned in the car.

I gave her my gloves, a little hug and said a quick prayer with her for safety on the road. As I was walking over to my car, she said, "So, are you like an angel or something?"

This definitely made me cry. I said, "Sweetie, at this time of year angels are really busy, so sometimes God uses regular people."

And of course, you guessed it, when I got in my car it started right away and got me home with no problem. I'll put it in the shop tomorrow to check, but I suspect the mechanic won't find anything wrong.

I don't know if the story is true... and I don't think it really matters... it is a story of being a friend... of taking the initiative to ease someone's pain...

Joyfully, completely, lovingly...

Thanks be to God for friendship, amen.

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