

So Simple, So Hard...

© Rev. Catherine MacDonald

Acts 10:44-48

John 15:9-17

June 14, 2009 - UM

Good Morning!

You are probably wondering who I am.

My name is Esther; I am one of the many un-named women who were Jesus' disciples.

I was with him almost from the beginning.

It was exciting to be part of something new.

My parents didn't exactly approve of me following Jesus around, but my grandmother Esther had left me some money and so I didn't have to marry right away.

My father of course blamed my independent nature on being named after my independent grandmother...

She was a bit of a free-spirit too.

But it didn't matter to me why I was a woman who wanted a bit of adventure.

All I knew was that there was nothing and nobody that could hold me back when Jesus came to town.

And when he left, I was with him.

Now don't go thinking I was one of those ragged fisherman type people that Jesus gathered around him.

Or that tax collector Matthew.

Like Jesus, I too was of the house of David, although I was from wealthier branch of the family.

But somewhere along the line... we were cousins.

However, that didn't mean that I wanted to sleep on the ground without even so much as a tent to shelter me!

So I brought two of my servants with me: Saul to set up my tent and gather fire wood and all those other things that need doing when you are on the move.

And Miriam to attend to the rest of my needs, like making sure my robes were fresh and braiding my hair each morning.

After all, just because I was following Jesus around from town to town, and just because some of the people were not of my class, didn't mean I had to start acting or dressing like them!

But enough about me....

Jesus was an exciting man to be around.

He told us stories about what the Kingdom of heaven and God were was like.

That it was like a banquet where everybody was welcome...

That God was like a man welcoming home a son who had gone astray...

That God knew everyone of us... even down to the hairs on our heads...

And that the kingdom of it was here and now, not some far off place that we couldn't even imagine.

Well, let me tell you, some of the things he said upset the authorities.

Not just the Romans, but also the rabbis and scholars.

Some of them didn't like the way Jesus welcomed everybody into the circle.

Women, children, anyone who wanted to follow travel with Jesus was welcome.

It didn't matter who your father was or what you had to offer... you could go along.

Many of our people are quite the story tellers, but I tell you, Jesus was one of the best...

The parables he told...

And while sometimes they were hard to understand... for a while, it all seemed so simple...

Jesus said that all the rules and regulations that had been built up over the centuries could be boiled down to this: love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

Well, that just seemed too simple!

Just two rules!

Nothing about not lighting a fire on the Sabbath!

Nothing about a woman having to absent herself from the rest of the community during her monthly time.

Nothing about paying for animals to sacrifice.

Just love God, and love your neighbor as yourself.

There was this one week, Jesus had been talking to us about him being like a shepherd and we, his followers, the sheep.

Then he said that he was like a vine and we were the branches.

And that we were to abide in him, just as he abided in God and God in him.

Well, this made perfect sense to me, he knew best.

He was our teacher... the one who was teaching us about the kingdom of God....

But one day, we were gathered around and he said, "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."

Then he said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

Okay, I could do this... loving God and loving neighbor... even though I wasn't quite sure how.

But then!!!! He said, "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 I have heard from my Father."

What did this mean?

I no longer call you servants, but friends...

This was beginning to sound like more was going to be expected of us!

More than following him around and listening to him and watching him feeding the poor, heal the sick and set free the prisoners.

I hope he didn't mean that I would have to feed the poor, and get close to the sick.

Ugh!

I may have been an adventurous girl, but I didn't want to do that!

I had servants to do that if necessary!

Yes, that was the answer, my servants could do the work for me.

That seemed like the ideal solution, but as soon as that thought popped into my head, I could hear Jesus' voice in my head saying, "I no longer call you servants, I call you friends..."

Now I was confused!

Were my servants supposed to be my friends?

Well, they were my friends!

Saul had looked after my needs since I was old enough to live in my own tent.

And Miriam... Miriam had been with me since birth!
Of course they were my friends!

But wait... they worked for me... they had to do what I told them... or they didn't get fed!

They weren't my friends, they were my servants...

And then those words of Jesus echoed in my head again... "I no longer call you servants, I call you friends... that you love one another as I have loved you..."

Was I supposed to treat my servants as my friends?

Was I supposed to love them as Jesus loved me?

Was I supposed to continue Jesus work?

That was a bit much for me to take in all at once, so I thought about it as we traveled.

In fact, I could scarcely think of little else.

The days passed... and we drew ever closer to Jerusalem...

You all know what happened there.

First the wild welcome, then the arrest, and then they killed him.

We all thought it was the end.

And then he was back!

We didn't know how, but he was with us.

And still those words of his haunted me, "I no longer call you servants, I call you friends."

I remembered how he looked at each of us with such love in his eyes.

It didn't matter who it was, the love shone through.

And one day, I looked at my servant Miriam, and tried to see her as Jesus would see her.

A child of God, doing her best, day in and day out.

And I realized that Saul was the same, he worked tirelessly at his appointed tasks.

Could I do less than they?

What were my appointed tasks?

Then those words again, "I no longer call you servants, I call you friends."

I realized that it was my job to continue the work that Jesus started.

To love God and love my neighbor as myself.

And we were all neighbors!

To look at each person through the eyes of God.

Valued by God.

Loved by God.

Suddenly my eyes were opened and I saw all of us as important and unique parts of God's creation.

It didn't matter how different we looked.

It didn't matter what town we came from.

And I soon found out that it didn't even matter if we were all Jewish.

All that mattered was that God loves us and wants us to love one another.

Just as Jesus did.

So simple... and so hard...

To love one another, as I have loved you.

Farewell my friends, and God bless.