

Preacher: Vicar Tim Redfield Date: July 27, 2008 Text: John 15:9-17

Theme: Share Your Christian Friendship

I want you to think about your friends. Think about who they are and what you like to do with your friends. As you think about your friends it is easy to see that they are an important part of your life. Our friends are there for us in our time of need. Our friends give us help, support and comfort in our day to day lives. Many of us would even have a person that we call our best friend. This could be a spouse or perhaps someone that you have grown up with from little on. We all like to have friends who we can spend time with and who will be there for us when we really need them. Friends are certainly a great blessing in our lives. Through the Scriptures we are reminded of how Jesus is our Friend. We are going to see that the friendship we have with Jesus is different than the friendship we have with other people in this world. While we are looking at Jesus' friendship with us, we will see him encouraging us to Share Our Christian Friendship. First of all he is going to show us an undeserved friendship. Then he will remind us that as his friends, we love each other.

Part 1: Jesus shows us undeserved friendship

In the verses before our text for today, Jesus is talking to the disciples about the importance of remaining connected to him. He starts chapter 15 by comparing the Christian to a branch that is connected to a vine. When a person has faith in Jesus they have a living faith which produces fruits just like the branch that is connected to the vine. If the branch is cut off from the vine then it will not produce fruit and it will die off. This branch is the person that does not stay connected to Jesus.

Think about this imagery. Are we the living branch connected to the vine of Jesus or are we the dying branch that has been separated from the vine? Jesus reminds us that as believers we are connected to the vine. Since we are connected to the vine, Jesus tells us that we produce fruit. What is the fruit that the believer ought to be producing? Today Jesus focuses our attention on the fruit of love. The believer produces love. As we look closer at the words of John, we will see how this love shows itself in friendship.

Before we can have Christian friendship in our hearts, Jesus needs to give us his love and friendship. When Jesus decided to love us and show friendship toward us, he did not wait for us to love him first. He did not even wait for us to be nice and friendly toward him. He showed the greatest love toward us even though we did not deserve it. Jesus described that great love in verse 13 when he said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." Think about that for a minute. Think about how Jesus unselfishly gave up his life. Ask yourself: would you willingly give up your life for your friends? You might say that you would. But then ask yourself: would you be willing to give up your life for your enemies? The answer to that would probably be no. Jesus gave up his life for sinners. Jesus gave up his life for his enemies. He did this to show his friendship toward each one of us.

Think about how gracious and compassionate it was for Jesus to offer himself up for people who did not deserve that grace. Jesus has shown the greatest love to all of us. Upon examining our hearts we see that we have not always shown love to others. Thanks be to God that Jesus always showed perfect love, thus forgiving our imperfect love. Jesus showed love throughout his life. He healed many people. He showed obedience to those in authority. He raised people from the dead. He loved us so much that he earned our forgiveness. By redeeming us from our sins, he even made it possible for us to become his friends.

Jesus encourages us, even commands us to remain in his love. This means that we obey his commands. Elsewhere Jesus tells us, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:39). This is the summary of Commandments 4 through 10. These commandments talk about our relationship with people here on earth. They talk about giving respect to others, not harming them, not lusting after another person's body, not lying about them or tarnishing their reputation, not taking their property or even thinking about taking their property, spouse, or anything they own.

These commands are difficult enough for us to follow but then Jesus adds to it in this way, "Love each other *as I have loved you*" (15:12). Jesus loves us with a perfect love. Two good examples of Jesus' love for people can be seen in some of his miracles. This last week at VBS we saw how Jesus showed his love for his believers by healing a Roman Centurion's servant who was ill. Jesus healed this servant because of the great faith shown by that Centurion. We also saw how Jesus showed his caring heart by raising Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus was a very close friend of Jesus. Jesus showed his compassion toward Lazarus and his family. Jesus was so moved that he cried at the tomb of Lazarus before bringing him back to life. There are just two examples of that great love that Jesus shows for his believers. He shows that perfect love which moves him to act compassionately toward us.

Do we live up to the expectations that Jesus has placed before us? Do we always show love to our neighbor? Do we show love in the same way that Jesus has shown love to us? Far too often we do not live up to these commands. Obviously we do not perform miracles like Jesus but we can show compassion and love toward others with the same kind of attitude that Jesus had. Many times we do not act in this way. Far too often we remain self centered. If someone has

disrespected us, then we may not give them the respect they deserve. If someone has harmed us either physically or emotionally, we desire to harm them back. If we were to truly love others just as Jesus has loved us, then we would love others who often do not return our love. Many times we reason that we are not going to act friendly toward others because they did not reach out to us first and try to be our friends.

Part 2: As Jesus' friends we love each other

Jesus tells us that we are his friends if we do what he commands (v14). At first glance it seems like we have to obey Jesus' commands to be his friends. However we learn that this is not the case. We have seen that we have failed to obey his commands on many occasions. Jesus obeyed God's commands in our place and won forgiveness for us. Something has to happen to us to make it possible for us to be Jesus' friends. Something has to change inside of us before we can obey God's commands.

What makes it possible for us to obey God? We are able to obey God once we have been given the gift of faith in our hearts. This makes it possible for us to be Jesus' friends. What an incredible Savior we have. Not only did he obey the law for us and suffer our punishment, but he also has sent us the Holy Spirit into our hearts to create the love in us that he speaks about. Through the Spirit working in our hearts, we are filled with the love of Christ and we are given the desire to do what he commands.

Jesus chooses us to be his believers. He says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (15:16). We had a good example of this on the first day of VBS. Jesus came to Matthew and called him to be his disciple. To the people at that time this would have seemed strange. Matthew was a tax collector. Tax collectors were thought of as the absolute worst people because they worked for the Roman government and it was well known that they cheated people. And yet Jesus chose Matthew as his disciple. Jesus reaching out to Matthew shows us how Jesus reaches out to all kinds of people with his Gospel. Jesus loves all people.

Jesus has reached out to each one of us. Through his Word, through the waters of baptism he called us out of the unbelieving world to be his friends. We did not come to him on our own. He sought us out and made us believers. Give thanks for that incredible kindness that he has shown to you. Give thanks for that faith that he has placed in your heart. He has made us his friends. We who did not deserve the great love that Jesus has shown us are now his closest and dearest friends.

Now that we have become Jesus redeemed friends, what is our response? How do we show our thanks? Jesus who has appointed us to bear fruit (15:16) tells us exactly what that fruit is. He tells us to "Love each other" (15:17). After we have faith in our hearts we are able to show Christian friendship to others. Of course there are still going to be times that we sin while trying to do this. However we keep on living our life of faith and keep on trying to serve others with the same love that Christ has shown us.

There are many ways that we can love each other. We can start by being a friend toward others. Perhaps this can be as simple as saying "hi" and introducing yourself to someone new. Here at church that could make someone feel welcome and want to come back. If you are kind to a neighbor who doesn't go to church, it might create an opportunity in the future to talk to them about Jesus. Sometimes this is called friendship evangelism. When you develop a friendship with a person, then a trust is built and they might be more willing to listen when you talk to them about their Savior. There are many ways to show love. It may be that you prepare a meal for someone. It might be visiting someone who is sick. Perhaps you simply provide a listening ear when someone truly needs it. Because we are motivated by the love that Christ has shown to us, we go out into this world and serve others with love. We build Christian friendships.

Conclusion

Our theme for Vacation Bible School this year is "Friendship Trek: Jesus our Forever Friend." As we looked at our Bible stories and conducted our activities we always focused on how Jesus is our friend. He showed us this by saving us from our sins and giving us faith. His friendship encourages us to be friends with others. Everyday we ended with what we called a "Good friend challenge." This was an encouragement for all of us to put our faith into practice. Right now I am going to give these challenges to all of you. As I list them, think of ways that you can show Christian friendship and love in your daily lives. 1. Ask Jesus to help you make a new friend this week. 2 Be an advocate for someone today. 3. Tell someone about the gifts Jesus gives his friends. 4. Do something kind for a friend today. 5. Think of a friend who does not know Jesus. Ask God to help you share Jesus with him or her. As you can see, these challenges are ways for us to reach out with the love of Christ. May God encourage all of us to be Christian friends.