



6 Easter: St. Barnabas, New Westminster with Confirmations and Receptions

John 15:9-17

Jesus said to his disciples, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 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. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. 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. You 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. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

Some of us grow up knowing in our bones what friendship is all about. Others of us don't learn what friendship is until much later in life. I, sad to say, was one of those "others"—one of those people who finally learned about and experienced friendship as an older adult.

It might have been because I was an army brat with a family that moved around a lot. It might have been that, even from a young age, I was more attentive to getting things done than attending to relationships. Whatever it was, at a low point as an adult, I woke up to the fact that I was missing something important in my life. And so one day I had tea with someone I knew, and I popped two questions. First: "Catharine, will you be my friend?" And, second: "Catharine, will you tell me what friendship is?"

I will never forget her response.

Catharine looked at me with a puzzled, concerned expression and said, “Yes, Melissa, I will be your friend,” and then went on to tell me, “Friends are people you hang out with. Friends are people you can be yourself with. Friends tell you the truth.”

In our Gospel for today we hear Jesus talking a lot about friendship. His words are from what many call the “Farewell Discourse” in the John—Jesus’ final comments to his disciples before his betrayal, suffering and death. In this discourse Jesus is trying to help the disciples finally understand some important things before he leaves them.

And so what does Jesus talk about? He talks about the same things we might talk about to those we love before our deaths: he talks about love and connection. But, of course, because he’s Jesus, he talks about love and connection writ large: God’s love for Jesus, himself, Jesus’ love for the disciples, and the disciples’ love for one another. But in and through all these things, he focuses on one simple, powerful and, I might add, counter-cultural image to describe how God is related to the disciples and to us. One simple, powerful image of what God asks of them and us as we relate to each other. That image is the image of friendship.

God has chosen us to be God’s friends. God asks us to befriend one another.

And, so today I’d like to riff off of my friend Catharine’s description of friendship as a way to explore our friendship with God and with one another. I want to focus on friendship today because today we are further strengthening the circle of God’s friends in the Anglican Church of Canada through confirming and receiving six people here at St. Barnabas. At times as important as these it’s useful to remind ourselves what our friendship with God means for us and how to nurture it as we enter into a deeper friendship with one another and with the world.

First, friends hang out with each other.

Imagine this, the Creator of the universe wants to hang out with you and the Creator of the universe wants you to want the same. Another way of saying this is to state this more generally: friendship cannot thrive without time spent together. In terms of our relationship with God, this means nurturing the sense of the presence of God in our day-to-day lives, a presence that is as close to us as our breath. And so it means breathing in, and in that breath, cherishing the gift of life we have been given. It means looking at the world with God-colored lenses, which is to say, looking for the traces of God’s presence in everyday life, especially in those places where some would say that God is absent. It means cultivating a heart of gratitude in all things in that we believe that there is no place where God is not.

Friends hang out with each other. We need to hang out with God.

Second, friends are those with whom we can be ourselves.

When Jesus took on our flesh, every experience that you and I have ever had was comprehended by God. What this means is that you and I don't have to put on airs, don't have to clean ourselves up, don't have to be anyone other than who we are to be acceptable and lovable to God. Jesus bridges every gap we can imagine and so, honestly, there is nothing left except to be ourselves with God, to let our hair down, to tell all, to bring our real questions, our real tendencies, our real brilliance to the one who loved us enough to live our lives and to die our death. It was one of the greatest reliefs that I had ever felt for this to finally sink in for me one day—that I did not have to pretend to be brilliant, accomplished, and spotless in order to be in relationship to God through Jesus. First and foremost I had to be myself; I had to bring myself.

Friends are those we can be ourselves with. We need to offer who we really are to our God.

And, finally, friends tell you the truth. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the truth of Jesus' life, that the entire world has been made our kin, is mediated to us today (and this is the kind of truth I am talking about here.) By the power of the Holy Spirit we are constantly being steered into situations in which we have the opportunity to stretch ourselves and live out the truth of our kinship with the entire world through being the kind of human being that Jesus was—courageous, caring, risk-taking on behalf of other. The truth of Jesus' life of kinship and its ability to be the life we lead, this is the truth that is whispered to us through the Spirit, this is the truth that beckons to us, this is the truth that nudges us and sometimes propels us forward as Christian people.

Friends tell you the truth. We need to watch and listen for God the Holy Spirit who leads us into the truth that we have become each other's kin.

Today we're confirming and receiving six new people into the Anglican Church of Canada. These confirmations and receptions all stand on the foundation of our baptism, and so once again we will affirm our faith and trust in God as Creator, God as Jesus, and God as Holy Spirit. We will also once again reaffirm our baptismal promises, those practices that keep us close to God, to one another and to the world that is our kin. As we do things, remember that all of this is about one thing—that God has chosen you and me to be God's friends and that from that friendship, God is asking us to befriend one another and a world that needs it.