

Rev. Dan Welch Easter 6 5-9-21 Text- John 15: 9-17

Jesus calls us His friends. Right in the middle of our text today He declares His friendship with us. Amidst all the talk of love, joy, and obedience Jesus announces that the relationship we have with Him is friendship. That is a rare and precious gift indeed.

Today friendships are hard to build. Time is a problem. Everyone is so busy with work, family, sports, household responsibilities, that there is little time or energy left over for cultivating a good friendship.

Another problem: Many people don't know how to be a good friend. Too many misuse the relationship for their own purposes. They want you around only when you can do something for them or only as long as you can make them feel good. As soon as you're not useful or enjoyable anymore, they're gone. It's hard to risk friendship when you're likely to get abused in the process.

Then there's the simple fact that friendship makes us vulnerable. A friend sees us for who we really are. We let our guard down around a friend. We tell friends things we wouldn't tell anyone else. That's threatening, because then, the true you comes out. Friends get to see us

for who we really are as we relax and be ourselves for a change. It's not easy to open ourselves up that way, and so a good friendship is too often avoided.

We all know how rare a good friendship actually is. Even though we need friends- we need someone to talk to, confide in, share with, and enjoy; we need to be accepted and loved for who we are- those kind of relationships are hard to come by today. The time, the risk, and the vulnerability make friendships all too rare.

Maybe that's why we find Jesus' offer of friendship so hard to accept. To be sure, we long for His company. Here is someone who will listen to us. We can confide in Him anytime we wish. We can be with Him anytime we want. He always has time for us.

Here is someone who will treat us right. His promise is to fill us with joy. His promise is to give us what we ask in His Name. He even gave His life for us.

Here is someone who loves us in spite of who we are. We come to Him in honesty, and He will not turn away from us. We show Him what we really think and feel, and He still accepts us.

We long for this kind of friendship. His time is our time. His friendship is pure and good. His love is for us. How precious and rare it is to be chosen as Jesus' friend.

But our time and energy for this friendship are all too little. Moms and dads can especially understand the pressure here. Getting everyone dressed, fed, and ready every morning is about the most we can handle. Who has time for an extra half-hour of devotions, or even ten minutes? Sunday is the one day to rest and catch up, so it's no wonder our minds may be on the many things we want to do today instead of on the Divine Service. Family devotions? Many families hardly ever even eat meals together anymore, let alone have devotions. No time. No energy. Our friendship with Jesus fades from neglect.

We wonder about His friendship. Does He treat us right? Does He really hear our prayers? The past fourteen months, since the outbreak of

the pandemic, have been one long, stressful journey filled with lots of low valleys and very few mountain-top experiences. Jesus doesn't seem to supply us with much joy. Problems abound. Life is tough. He doesn't seem to make it any easier. We hurt, His care and concern seem so far away. Our friendship with Jesus withers in doubt.

Or, we simply avoid Him altogether. Here is someone who **does** know who we really are. He shows us our weakness, our failures, our inadequacies. Who wants **those** wounds opened up? We want to feel good, not bad. We want praise and positive affirmation, not someone who can look right inside us and see what's really there. So the friendship with Jesus dies.

Or at least it **would** if Jesus were not such a true friend. You see, Jesus considers our friendship with Him so precious that He won't let it die. He chose us, not to wither and die like dead branches on a vine, but to live in Him and bear fruit. He wants us to be filled with joy, not cut off from Him in sadness. He wants us to know what He has in store for us as our friend.

He is a true friend. When it came to time, there was only time for us. He heard His Father's commands, and at the right time came down to earth. He shared His Father's love for us, even when it was time to be rejected and executed.

He is a true friend. A friend does what is right and good, even if it means sacrificing life itself. So Jesus is on the cross. He lays down His life for us. His friendship goes even to the grave, but it doesn't stop there. He takes His life back up again for us. Easter joy is with us for His friendship did not die in a tomb but rose victorious on the third day. There is no greater love than this. So what is right and good is that Jesus has shown Himself to be the best friend of all.

He is a true friend. A friend is always there, and the risen Christ will never leave us or forsake us. He made this promise to us in Holy Baptism. His promise means that no matter what Jesus finds inside of us, there is forgiveness. No matter what we confess to Him, there is still acceptance. No matter what we try to hide from Him, there is still love. What a True Friend we have in Jesus!

Do we need a friend to talk to? We can take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do we need a friend to walk with? We can open His Word anytime, and
He will be there.

Do we need a friend to accept us? We can go to His table and eat and
drink with His blessing. Here He welcomes us as He once did the sinners
and tax collectors. Here He renews His promise of friendship by giving us
His very body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. After all, 'greater love
has no one than this, that He lay down His life for His friends' and here He
puts in our mouths the benefits of His great sacrificial act on the cross.
Do we need a friend to love us? We can go to Jesus and remain in His love
always.

Do we need a friend? Yes, because true friendship is a rare and
precious blessing. And joy added to joy, joy to the fullest, Jesus has chosen
us to be His friends! Amen!