

Soul Refresher: Great Is Thy Faithfulness
Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost
October 13, 2019
John 15:9-17
Pastor Dea Sharp, Pikes Peak UMC


John 15:9-17 (NRSV)

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants^[a] any longer, because the servant^[b] 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. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

If I asked you "what is the name of your closest friend" who would you say?
Did any of you say the stock children's message answer? JESUS!

*What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!*

This is another of the songs that has been used, over the years, in the Billy Graham crusades. "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" is another "soul refresher" for us today and every day – and it can lead us to God's Word...and to Jesus .

Every one of us was created to have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Let' THAT sink in!

That we were created for that!

AND the *Son of God* wants to have a relationship with *us*.

When Joseph Scriven wrote "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" in 1855, the words *needed* to flow from his soul because not once, but twice he was engaged to be married and both times his fiancé died (one after an accident and the other due to illness) before the wedding. In the midst of his grief, Scriven turned to Jesus, his close friend.

“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but **I have called you friends**, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you,” Jesus says in John (15:15, ESV)

Let THAT sink in – WE HAVE, because Jesus calls US friends, access to *everything* Jesus has heard from his Father!

Billy Graham once said, “Even sorrows turn to blessings when they make us less attached to the earth and more attached to God. Then, more than ever, we discover that Jesus truly is our friend—‘All our sins and griefs to bear.’”

According to Webster’s Dictionary a friend is:

Someone whom one knows well and is fond of.

Someone on the same side of a struggle – the opposite of enemy. Are you thinking of the folks in your address book?

Someone who is a supporter and is helpful and reliable. Are you picturing them in your mind?

With those characteristics of a friend in mind, let’s consider how Jesus fulfills all of them.

First, Jesus knows us!

Psalm 139 includes these verses (from the Message translation) that the psalmist is writing to God.

*I’m an open book to you;
even from a distance, you know what I’m thinking.
You know when I leave and when I get back;
You know everything I’m going to say before I start the sentence.
you formed me in my mother’s womb.
You know me inside and out,
every bone in my body;
you watched me grow... all the stages of my life are before you,*

Is it possible for anyone to know us better than that?

Our foibles and failures.

Our triumphs, urges, the things we crave and things we yearn for...

AND STILL LIKE US!!!

What a friend we have in Jesus!

And, when we take God's Word in, we realize that, in spite of our shortcomings, Jesus isn't just fond of us but loves us more than we can imagine. Paul wrote to the Romans and told them *"For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. God demonstrates God's love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:6-8)

Let's consider that!

In today's reading we heard, *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."* (John 15:13)

Jesus, our Friend, did that!

Jesus gave his earthly life to save us from our sins and provide us with eternal life.

Kinda makes our gift bags look feeble – but a friend gives and Jesus gave it all.

And then, after his resurrection and he had returned to Heaven, (where he said he was going to prepare our place) Jesus didn't leave us to flounder about by ourselves.

NO! He sent the Holy Spirit to live in us and guide us.

The gift keeps on giving!

THAT'S someone who knows us well!

The second definition I named earlier was that a friend is on our side.

Not an enemy but an ally.

And the Bible teaches us that not only did Jesus redeem us and save us from bondage to sin, but that Jesus is nearby to help us when we are tempted BY sin. We're reminded in Hebrews (2:18) *"For He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted."*

I don't know about you, but that's a powerful statement to me.

Too often I am tempted – to eat too much, to be lazy, to do things that aren't good for me.

Anyone else?

But Jesus knows. HE was tempted, by Satan himself!

We don't name Satan OFTEN ENOUGH in our temptations – and we should!

Jesus was tempted and did NOT sin.

Why? So he could relate to us and what we experience.

What a friend – someone who can relate and THEN HELP US TO RESIST.

Jesus is on our side.

Scripture tells us that the whole reason Jesus came was, not to condemn us but to save us.

He is our friend. Jesus is our ally.

Many of you know the 23rd psalm. (And if you don't, pick up YOUR Bible when you get home and read it again.)

Can there be any better ally than the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who walks with us...EVEN through the valley of the shadow of death?

What a friend we have in Jesus.

Next, Jesus, our friend, is our supporter.

Again, from the book of Hebrews, we know that Jesus fully understands our needs and our hurts. It says, "We have a High Priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses..." (Hebrews 4:15) Because *he* was tempted in every way that we are, Jesus understands what we're going through.

AND – get this: he invites us to come to him for help.

That's not just friendly hogwash – like when we say we'll do something or be with someone...and then we don't or we aren't – Jesus DOES. And he wants us to ask him for help – more importantly, he wants us to know that he IS with us to help.

Amen?

Do we grumble and gossip to our earthly friends instead of going right to the One who knows us best? Who *really* feels our temptations and doesn't mumble platitudes but REALLY is able to help?

Even that is a simplistic way to describe him, 'cause Jesus is MORE than helpful. The Apostle Paul was able to get through all his trials and tribulations, he told the Philippians: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (4:13)
And so can we.

And lastly, for today, Jesus is a reliable friend.

In his last words, written in Matthew, to the disciples, Jesus said, "...I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20b)

As I prepared this message, I was awed – AGAIN - by the realization that Jesus is not distant and far away.

No!

Jesus knows us, loves us, cares for us, is an intimate friend and always has our best interest in his heart.

That's the best friend anyone could ever have.

So - do we, do you know Jesus that way?

Do you confide in him? He's the one who can hear our confessions and still continue to be our friend!

Do we turn to him as someone who can give us the best counseling?

Listen: Jesus cares when we hurt, or are angry, happy or sad.

One commentary said that "Christ takes believers to be his friends. He visits them and converses with them as his friends, bears with them and makes the best of them, he pleads for them in heaven and takes care of all their interests there."

So, how do we grow in our friendship and relationship with Jesus?

Go back to your address book or contact list and how you feel around friends.

Do you feel comfort and safety?

Do you get the feeling you're where you're supposed to be when you're with them?

Being around friends often brings us peace, and we find ourselves wanting to be around them more.

That's the way it can be with Jesus, too...AND MORE! But how?

We have to invest **well** in your friendships, don't we?

('Cause if we're not feeling comfort and safety, joy or peace with the people we're hanging out with, maybe we need to evaluate who we're calling friends)

And just like a good investment with our earthly friends, **a relationship with Jesus requires investment of time and effort, too.**

We talk to our friends, but do we talk to Jesus?

When we have something on our mind, do we "take it to the Lord in prayer"?

FIRST!

Praying is just talking to Jesus, like you would a good friend.

And when we pay attention, he's talking to US through God's Word.

In his book, *Peace With God*, Billy Graham wrote, "Some of you believe that you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, but you haven't really made Him your Lord. You're missing the peace of God in your struggles and turmoils and trials and pressures of life."

When Joseph Scriven's SECOND fiancé died, he turned to Jesus, his closest friend.

As we go through the ups and downs of our lives, remember Jesus is here with us, ready to listen, ready to walk beside us in whatever life brings.

I got hung up browsing Pinterest the other night. Talk about a temptation! I was seeing crafts that say: "Jesus *knows* me, this I love" which is a twist of the words of the children's song "Jesus Loves Me" and a testimony to having a friendship with Jesus.

What a friend we have in Jesus.

He knows us.

He love us.

He is our ally and supporter and he is reliable.

He loves us and is present every step of our way.

Amen!