

Friendship, Jesus' Style

Homily for May 15th 2022
5th Sunday Easter

One of my favorite Old Testament verses is from Proverbs 18 and it is about friendship: It states:

***Some friends play at friendship
but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin.¹***

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "I call you friends" Today we want to think about the kind of friendship Jesus shares with us, the kind of friendship that is closer than one's nearest kin. What is friendship Jesus' style?

Let's begin by thinking about diverse kinds of friendship. There are friendships of pleasure. These are relationships where people really enjoy sharing in recreation, like hiking together, going to sporting events, where the gift of each other's company is a blessing to both. There are also friendships of utility. These might be forged at work where people truly are friends, but it is a friendship that is primarily known in the work setting. These friendships are significant and important but are not necessarily the kind of friendships where "one is closer than one's nearest kin."

This "closer than one's nearest kin" kind of friendship is what I would call virtuous friendship. These are friendship not bound by personality or being on the same sports team. Virtuous friendship is that kind of relationship where people are captivated by someone or something bigger than themselves. Virtuous friendship is what Jesus is talking about in today's Gospel when he states:

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you, so you are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"

Here is an expression of virtuous friendship. There is a goal that is greater than ourselves, but one we are invited to focus on together. This is to be disciples of Jesus. Now let me make the following distinction. There are many people who might believe in Jesus but are not necessarily disciples of Jesus. The word disciple comes from a Greek word that would best be translated as "learner." So, for us to grow in virtuous friendship with Jesus and one another means that we are discovering the goal of learning from Jesus. Jesus can say of us "You are my learners." You see Jesus doesn't want us to just believe in him, but to be his students.

So, to be a true disciple, "the way people will know if you're really my students," Jesus would say, "is if you love like I the master love." And this is how the teacher/student relationship was

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#) (Pr 18:24). (1993). National Council of Churches of Christ.

in 1st Century Judaism. When you took up with a rabbi or when you studied under a rabbi, it was never just assumed that you would learn his ideas and make his ideas your ideas, but that you would walk with him in the way that he walked. You would follow the path that he led.

Not let's pause here for a minute and go back to the first verse from today's gospel reading: There St John tells us that "when he went out." Who is the "he"? It is Judas Iscariot. You see he didn't want a virtuous friendship with Jesus, he wanted, at most a friendship of utility, where with Jesus at his side we could deal with the pesky Romans and rid Israel of them! Therefore, it is only when Judas has left that Jesus can know talk about the friendship that is closer than one's nearest kin, the friendship that exists between those who are Jesus' friends and disciples.

And what is friendship Jesus' style? It is sacrificial friendship. It is the kind of love that wills the good of another person, even unto suffering and death itself. And you can see that that's what Jesus means by "love," in the Gospel of John by looking at John 15. For their Jesus teaches:

Greater love (agape) has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends.

So, for Jesus, sacrificial love is the supreme expression of love. It's the highest form of love to lay down your life for another person. It's certainly the highest form of love of neighbor. And so, that's the essence, that's the heart of the New Commandment that Jesus is giving to his apostles. "I want you to love one another as I have loved you." In other words, "I want you to love one another sacrificially." To be able, not just able, but willing to lay down your lives for one another. And this, he ends by saying, "this is how people will know that you are my disciples.

Now with this in mind, I want to share with you a special way St. Peter's is being invited to love Jesus' style. On June 2nd, we will be welcoming to Calgary a family of three. Saaed, Elham, and Rose their 8th month old daughter. They are originally from Iran but have been at a refugee camp in Turkey for the past three years. This is because Saaed converted from Islam to Catholicism and as a result he was ostracized in his home country and his life was even threatened. When St Paul says in today's reading from Acts that it is many persecutions that we enter the kingdom of God, Saaed, Elham and Rose have experienced this first hand.

I am pleased to let you know we have secured an apartment for them in Bowness, available this weekend, and so we will be ready to welcome them two weeks from Thursday. In the Narthex there is a trellis display that has flowers that have on them household items that we want to provide for their home. If you can please take one with you and bring the item to church next Sunday, or drop it off at the office.

As well, to sponsor them will cost \$32,000.00 for a year. To date we have raised over \$18,000.00. If you would like to contribute financially, we will have a way to do that electronically starting next weekend. If you would like to contribute by cheque, indicate in the memo "Saaed and family".

I am thankful for the support of the parish to date and look forward for the opportunity welcome this Saaed, Elham and Rose as extend the love of Jesus to them. There will also be ways people can help out personally accompanying them to appointments and extending hospitality to them,

In the Book of Revelation today we read of the New Heaven and New Earth when St John writes “See the home of God is among humans”. We pray that for Saaed, Elham and Rose they will find a new home here in Calgary and at St. Peter’s where virtuous friendship is offered so that we can express the love of Jesus. It is my prayer that with time we may discover with them a friendship that sticks closer than one’s nearest kin.