

Jesus is a Friend

Jesus Is: Part 1 “Jesus is a Friend”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – January 17th, 2021

2nd Sunday After Epiphany

Readings: John 15:9-17

Reflection: Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Greeting: For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: O Lord God, your chosen dwelling is the heart of the lowly. We give you thanks that you revealed yourself in the holy child Jesus, thereby sanctifying all childhood in him. Make us humble in faith and love, that we may know the joy of the gospel hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed unto babes. This we ask in the name of the One, who, wearing our mortal flesh, grew in wisdom and in favor with God and all people, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 139

To the leader. Of David. A Psalm. O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it. For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed. How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them—they are more than the sand; I come to the end—I am still with you.

(Psalm 139:1-6,13-18 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 139 and hear of God's care and presence. That God is there for us before we know we need him. That God knows us inside and out. We are called to praise God for his wondrous works. If God knows us completely, it means that we can turn to God with anything. Do we always turn to God with our problems and our worries? How can we learn to trust God even more? How can we share that presence with others? How can we turn to Christ as a friend and confidant in all things?

Prayer: Oh Lord, help us as we remember all that has been done for us. Let us recall all the ways that you help us and are there for us. Especially in this time, help us to recognize all the ways that your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, is in our lives. Help us to see all the ways that he is with us. Let us turn to him as a friend in our time of need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our reading is from John chapter 15, verses 9 through 17.

*“As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete. This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to give up one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I don’t call you servants any longer, because servants don’t know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you. You didn’t choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last. As a result, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. I give you these commandments so that you can love each other.
(John 15:9-17 CEB+)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This Sunday we start a new series and we'll be continuing this series until Lent. Over the next few weeks, we are going to be looking at different roles and titles that we have for Jesus in our series “Jesus Is.” I wanted to start with a role that I think is quite possibly the most relevant and central role in our lives, while also being the one that I think we downplay the most. And for that it would be that Jesus is your friend. And you know this can feel a little odd because though we often will speak about Christ as a friend, we're not as good as treating him as such. And too often we let the idea of Lord and King be so high and above that we almost treat Jesus as someone barely reachable. That we're barely able to reach to him and that we're lucky to be able to do so. I think the problem with that is that it doesn't quite agree with what Jesus told us. In our reading for today from the Gospel of John, Jesus lays out how he feels about his disciples and he wants them to know that he is a friend. That he can't call them servants any longer because he's made everything known to them. I think this is interesting, because the way that we approach in authority figure is very much different from the way that we turn to a friend. And I think sometimes we miss having some of that close personal relationship with Jesus, because we're so busy treating him as an authority figure that we don't think of him as a friend.

I think it's actually key for us to be able to contemplate Christ as a friend, especially if we just stop and think about a few simple questions. If you're in a jam, and you're not sure what to do, do you contact an authority figure or do you contact a friend? And most of the time we're going to contact a friend because we want somebody we can confide in, somebody that will listen. We want somebody who isn't going to be thinking about what they get out of it, but simply thinking about the best way to help us. Someone who genuinely cares about us. Not just cares about the outcome but cares about the person. And I see all this because this is the idea I get of friendship when we start talking about Christ. That Christ should be the first person you should be able to turn to because he's there and because you trust him. And it's important to be able to do that because we are always going to need someone to lean on. And it's easier if that someone is Christ.

Jesus doesn't say that we are bound by having to follow a lot of pomp and a lot of formality. You don't expect formality from a friend. And I think that's another key thing to take away is that, when we talk to a friend, we are talking to somebody that we are willing to share everything with. When we talk about a good friend, we're talking to somebody that we trust with everything. Things that we wouldn't tell other people. Things that we would be ashamed of. Things that we don't know how to handle. We turn to a friend in our time of need. That's who we turn to when we're in trouble and it's who we turn to when things are going well. When things are good, we turn to a friend because they're the first ones that we want to tell. They're the ones that we want to give the good news to. And I think that's interesting because of the fact that if we think of Jesus first and foremost as a friend, it means that he's high up on the list of the people that we want to tell our good news to when something's going well. As a friend, we're also going to turn to Christ to say that we need help when we need help. We're also here to confide our worries in our friend. It also means that when we look at what Christ says and does, that we are given the idea of the way a friend treats others. How to be a good friend. And one of the things that Jesus says in our reading for today is that one of the best things you can do is lay down your life for your friends. We may not all be called to make such a great sacrifice, but what it does mean is that we remember the sacrifices we make so that we may help our friends. And we see friendship emulated in the way that Christ teaches, helps, heals, and all that Christ does for others. We see a friend emulated. And I think that's hugely important. If we are going to say that Christ is with us and we are in Christ, we have to be willing to treat him like a friend.

For me, personally, that means dropping some of the formalities. When I am praying and it is just me and Jesus, it's conversational. Because I'm talking to a friend. It might be full of worries and one-off statements of things that have just bothered me, but it's everything that I would tell a close friend. Everything that I would turn over to somebody that I trust, that I believe in, that I care about. Because, for me, thinking about Jesus as a friend becomes first and foremost because of everything a friendship should be. In our relationship with Christ, if we box ourselves in and don't let ourselves get close, we are always going to be missing out

because we are always pushing ourselves away. It's important that we be able to look at Christ as friend, because it helps us to understand our relationship better. Then we're not thinking about being just a servant to Jesus. We're not thinking about all the ways that we are unworthy. Instead, we are thinking about how happy we are to have this person in our life. So, when we see Christ as a friend. We're willing to let our guard down and to be comfortable, which means that we're going to be fully open. It also means that we aren't going to dance around and try to make everything sound better in our head. God already knows what we're doing and what we're thinking. But when we try to convince ourselves things are different than how they really are, and we convince ourselves via prayer, we've got a problem. And one of the ways to safeguard against that is to treat Jesus as a trusted friend. The person that you'd turn to say, look, I would try to keep this to myself, but I can't. I just need to get this off my chest. And there he is.

Over the next few weeks where we talk about different aspects of Christ, different things that Jesus is. But I started with friendship because I think that all the other things have to be viewed through the lens of friendship, because for Jesus, friendship means loving and caring. Friendship means being willing to sacrifice for the good of others. Being willing to do unpleasant things so that others don't have to deal with them. So, I wanted to talk about friendship first because the problem I run into is, if we can't think of Jesus as our friend, we are going to struggle to truly treat him as worthy of any other title. And I say this because it means that, though Christ has entrusted everything to us, that he views us as a friend, it means that we're hesitating because we're unsure. And it might be that we're unsure of ourselves but know that if you aren't sure Christ is there to help. Know that if you don't know what to do exactly, think of what you would do to a close friend, what advice you would ask for what advice you would give. Think about Christ as someone close to you, because he is. He is always there for us, no matter what. Truly a friend that will be there until the very end. A friend we can believe in and a friend we can trust to always be with us. Forever and always. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: Almighty and all-loving God, through your Son Jesus Christ you have reconciled the world to yourself. Help us now to be reconciled with one another, that again we might dwell in the warmth of your love. Inspire us with your Holy Spirit to put aside the cloak of pride and put on Christ, that we might forgive and be forgiven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Eric Veach	Cathy Devall
Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Don Stewart	Anne Winkler Heinrichs		Michael & Makenzie Reynolds
Ronnie Winstead	John Millsap	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons
Trinity Powers	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Family of Lois Woolever	Mary White
Nick Nichols	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams
Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte
Kim Hennes	Residents of the Greenup Nursing Center		

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An Update from Pastor Cameron

I wanted to give a quick update about returning to in person worship. At this point, it is dependent on our region getting moved into Tier 2 Mitigations. As of right now, we are not there. The Conference has said in person can resume when we enter Tier 2, but an immediate problem is that they announced multiple regions that immediately fell back into Tier 3 before the week was over. My suggestion is that we will likely need to be a week into Tier 2 before we move forward with in person plans. I'll be keeping an eye on it and getting in touch soon about those plans and what they will look like. However, know that at any moment they can slide back depending on our statistics. Long answer short, we aren't coming back yet, and it might be a while still before we are in the building again. Any questions just reach out.