

Easter 6B 2009 "What are friends for?" John 15:9-17

Jesus said: " **You are my friends**"

Everyone needs a friend. Little children sometimes have an imaginary friend or they talk to their teddy bear. My parents tell me that on a trip to Whyalla I held my bear up to the window the whole way so he could see out the window and we talked about what we were seeing! Maybe your best friend is your husband or wife, someone at school, your mum, or your dog - "mans best friend" (if you don't believe it, just try this experiment. Put your dog and your wife in the boot of your car for an hour. When you open the boot, which one really happy to see you again!?" - I ran that one past my best friend yesterday, and she said it would be ok to tell!) I wonder why people see their dog, cat or gold fish as their best friend? Maybe it's because they don't judge us or put us down, nag or answer back to us, they are just "there" for us and seem so consistent toward us.

A friend is someone who is just there for you and is happy to be with you and spend time with you. Friends accept you as you are even though they have seen you when you are not at your best. You can ask a favour from a friend and they from you. A friend is someone you can confide in and trust. If you had to phone a friend, who would you call?

Whether you have a special friend, many friends, acquaintances but no close friend, or just a gold fish for company, Jesus says to you today. "**You are my friends....I have called you friends**". Think about that. The one who went through Good Friday and died, died for you. The one who came out of the tomb looking for his friends names you among them, his friends, intimate friends and promises to be with you always. Jesus said: "**As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.**" We are not only friends, he treats us as one of the family, with the same love, the same relationship he has with God the Father. He lets us share in that relationship, an intimate relationship, a loving relationship of deepest closeness with God himself.

Friendships are normally based on two people sharing interests and liking eachother. Our friendship with God is not based on those things. God did not give up Jesus to the cross because we were so likeable. Jesus said "**You did not choose me, but I chose you..**" Our belief that we are God's friends is based on God's choice to save us and forgive us and begin a new relationship with us through Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus was known as "the friend of sinners" – people who have messed up their lives, people who haven't loved God, people who don't deserve his friendship. Now that's what I call a friend, it's what I call love! My wedding anniversary is coming up. Sometimes I wonder why my wife still chooses me. But she does, every day. And that's love. God chooses me every day too and he chooses to forgive and confirm his promises to me and to you. Every time we remember our baptism or look at the cross we remember God's choice of us to be his friends, his family, on his team. It's a choice of grace. It's a choice God, the best of friends makes for us every day.

One of the things friends do is confide in eachother, they reveal secrets, they are honest with eachother. They are free to share the truth with eachother. We do that with God when we pray – tell him all our darkest secrets and sins. He knows anyway so there's no point hiding them. And unlike our human friends when we tell God it stays with God. I don't think he blabs it all over heaven and he certainly tells noone on earth what we have told him. In fact he forgives us day after day Sunday after Sunday. He remains a true friend.

And Jesus says God has revealed his secrets to us. "**I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his masters business. Instead I call you friends for everything that I have learned from my Father I have made known to you.**" God isn't like a boss who tells us to mind our own business and leave him to his business. Jesus tells us God's business, he makes known God's thoughts and plans and heart to us. If we want to know God read what Jesus said and did. Those are God's thoughts, plans and secrets. Jesus has made known to us the loving will of God, the secret of the cross, the way of faith, the glory of eternal life. He has also shown us

God's love. God hides nothing. He is up front with us about our sinful nature and what we deserve. He tells us the harsh truth. But he forgives fully and unconditionally. That's no secret, because Jesus has revealed that to us in the word. The cross says it to the whole world.

Friends want to remain friends. We remain friends by continuing to do those things that make a relationship work and express the relationship that we enjoy. Every day God forgives us, lets us start again and he keep on loving us in a variety of ways. God wants us to do those things that show we remain in that loving relationship. Jesus said: "**Now remain in my love**". And how do we show that we remain in his love? He says: "**If you obey (keep) my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. My command is this: love eachother as I have loved you. Greater love has noone than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.**"

I guess we don't normally think love and obeying commands go together, or joy and sacrifice. But joy in the love of my wife led me to make a promise that I would love her and make sacrifices for her for life. I promised to keep those words and express that love. I promised to do that out of love and joy not fear and servitude. Keeping the call to love is not meant to be a burden but a joy, something I am willing to do.

Jesus puts love and obedience and joy and sacrifice together in this passage about our friendship with him. Love and joy in his love are reflected in obedience to his commands and sacrifice. In our relationship with Jesus he showed his love for us by obeying the Father and going to the cross to sacrifice his life for us. Now his love for us shows itself in our obedience to his command, especially his command to love eachother. Jesus was especially talking about life amongst his disciples. Today we'd say life in the church. The love Jesus has for us is seen in the way we love one another. Jesus has some strange friends – look around today! Who would bring this lot together on a Sunday morning? We might not. Jesus did! And he calls us to love eachother as his friends whether we feel close or not. Any friend of Jesus must be a friend of mine. And it goes further. Anyone Jesus wants to become one of his friends must also be a friend of mine and an object of my love.

Jesus said "**I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last**". We are chosen, we are his friends for a purpose. And that purpose is love. Love. That's our task from Jesus in one word. The difference he wants us to make is one of love, love for all his friends.

That is sometimes difficult, often beyond us. The world keeps telling us to make choices for ourselves and to be choosy about our friends. Jesus calls us to make different choices, choices of love for all his friends and would-be friends. And he says all we need do is ask for the power to do that, the love we need to do his command. He promises: "**The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.**" Of all the things we could ask for the one he would be most happy to answer is for the power to love as he has loved us.

Thank God for friends. Thank God for Jesus who calls us his friends. Remain in his love as his friends as you love and befriend people for him this week. Remember that any friend of his is a friend of ours. And ask him for the power to do it.

Considering all he has done for us it's the least we can do. After all, what are friends for.....?