

John 15: 7-17 “You are my friends” – sermon by Rev Lin Vawer for Sunday 9th May, 2021

May my words and our thoughts be acceptable to you Lord, as we desire to know you better and love you more AMEN

The gospel reading today takes place on the evening of the last supper. Jesus is speaking his final words, one last sermon, to his disciples. He is preparing them for life without his physical presence, pointing to what resurrected life, Easter life, is to be like.

As I was reading the passage, I was struck by how much love there is! It is filled with love –

“the Father has loved”, “ I have loved”, “ remain in his Love”, Love one another”, “ greater love has no man than this”. Remember The Beatles, their song *All you Need is Love* said everything was easy as long as you had love. I’m not sure it’s as simple as that. Love makes demands on us and often has to make compromises. The simple act of love asks for forgiveness, compassion, and thoughtfulness. It asks for time and attention, the most precious and scarce thing we have. Not that simple, then, this act of love.

Alongside all this love, sits the word “command”:

“Keep my commands”, “my Fathers commands”, “do what I command”. “This is my command: Love each other”. There is almost a neat little formula offered: the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the disciples, and the disciples are to love one another”. Ta da!easy, or maybe not? The word command makes it non-negotiable and that’s where it can cause panic to set in. Let’s be honest: loving isn’t easy when we are faced with a mix of people, some of whom are eminently loveable and others who are hard to love...

... and to be even more honest, to admit that for some, we are that hard to love person. I think the key to this “commandment” lies at the end of Jesus sentence – “as I have loved you.” What if we even read this phrase in the present tense, “love one another as I am loving you”. Maybe then we can see loving one another as less of a task on our to do list and more as a natural result of being loved ourselves.

Jesus goes on to give us the resource we need to be able to be able to do this, as he redefines his relationship with his disciples – “You are my friends”. Regardless of how old we are, we all want to know: who am I? What will sustain my life? Where is my place in the world? Here Jesus is giving some direct answers to those questions: You are loved. You are chosen. You are my friends.

In the old days when we were able to have parent evenings, when I said to a parent, “Is there anything you want to ask me?” the most asked question was, “Has my child got any friends?”. Now the friend of a four year old tends to be the child that they are sitting next to at the time, or who they shared a soggy crisp with them at lunchtime or best of all has let them have a go on a bike. They have at least 30 friends in the space of one day, everyone is their friend until they begin to gravitate to the ones who share their interests or even better, do the things that they would like to do but know they shouldn’t!

Does it ring any bells?!

We all need friends; the last year has taught us so much about the value of family but also our friendships.

Some of us have many friends, some only a few, but I think that a true friend is one that we enjoy being with, who shares our humour, our interests and is one we share our sadness and our joys. Sometimes they are the ones that do the things that we would like to do but can’t! We build a relationship that results in friendship, we are not so far away from our four year old self.

Sadly, there have been times where friendship has been all too short a commodity in our world. Competitiveness, a mobile society, a fragmented life tend to isolate people and make those traditional patterns of making and sustaining friends difficult. Unfortunately, the term “friend” is then reduced to “acquaintance” and all the ingredients of a deep relationship are lost.

It is really heartening then to hear Jesus use the language of friendship to illustrate his relationship with his followers: “I no longer call you servants.....Instead, I have called you friends.” The disciples are invited to look at their soon-to-depart Lord in a new light, to accept a relationship of intimacy and response.

So what does this friendship with Jesus look like -

Firstly, a friend of Jesus wants to know and obey his word – “You are my friends If you do what I command.” Jesus does not say, “you can become my friend if you do what I say”, rather he is telling us that the mark of a friend of Jesus is obedience to his commandment, particularly the special command to love as he has loved. Jesus has told us exactly who he is, what he has done for us and what he wants from us – no longer servants. We have been let into the plans. As friends we know everything. As friends of Jesus we become part of his story and his commands are not a burden but a desire to love and serve him better.

Jesus says, “You are my friends. I love you with the same love that the Father loves me I have told you everything. Follow my command.”

Secondly, a friend of Jesus wants their life and ministry to be spiritually fruitful. We are chosen. If there is any idea that this friendship is a result of mutual attraction, Jesus’ words turn that on its head “You did not choose me, but I chose you”. Students who wanted to learn the Torah would look for a Rabbi whose teaching they wanted to emulate. They made the choice. Jesus reverses this order. The decision is his. Yes, we make a conscious decision to follow Jesus but before the foundations of the world were set, God made the first choice, to love us and save us and we have been given the desire to bear fruit. The expectation of Jesus is that we not only produce spiritual fruit in our own lives but that we have part to play in producing fruit in the lives of others. “Go and bear fruit” – as disciples we cannot dictate when or where we act like friends.

Jesus says “You Are my friends. I appointed, ordained, commissioned and sent you. I trust and believe that you can do this. Go and bear fruit.”

Lastly, a friend of Jesus prays. “Whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.” Jesus doesn’t say: pray first that God would send you, he says go and as you are going pray to the Father.

Pray with passion,

Pray with the expectation that something will happen.

Pray with a will aligned that is with God’s.

Pray for lives that will be obedient and fruit bearing.

Jesus says, “You are my friends. I chose you. I wanted you. You are my joy, my life, and my purpose. You are loved. Ask in my name.”

Our friendship with Jesus is not insular or confined to a time, a place or a space. We are so privileged to be called a friend of Jesus and be called to a life of obedience, fruitfulness and prayer.

Let’s not waste that privilege. As the hymn says “what a friend we have in Jesus”

Let’s pray that we have the desire to truly be his friend too. Amen