

Sixth Sun Easter 2015

I'm going to start with a question: What were the first Christians called before they were called "Christians"? Hint: the answer is in today's Gospel...They were called "friends."...We just heard Jesus say to His disciples, "I have called you friends."...Before they were called anything else, Jesus called His first followers friends...and that applies to all of us who call ourselves His followers...Jesus calls us friends. Now before we consider what this could mean in our relationship with Jesus, here are a few quotes about friendship that I gathered from various places...(1) *10-yr old boy*: A friend is someone who knows everything about you,... but likes you anyway; (2) The gift of friendships is God's way of apologizing for our families; (3) A real friend won't get in your way...unless you're going down. (4) True friendship is like doing number one in your pants. (*got that image*) Everyone can see it, but only you can feel the warm feeling inside. ...Seriously, friendship is a wonderful thing...and friendship with Jesus can be even more wonderful.

We all know what makes a good friendship? ...Friends care about each other's welfare...They want the best 4 each other...Friends are always there when You need them...I'll bet many of us have found that the deepest friendships are formed in the midst of trouble or pain...I read a story about a lady living in South Carolina in the 1950's - whose neighbor had just died...At the funeral, she met the neighbor's servant, an African-American woman, and said to her, "I'm so sorry about Miss Lucy's death....You must miss her greatly. You were such good friends." ...The servant replied, "Yes'm, I miss her. But we wasn't friends."..."But I thought you were. ...I've seen you laughing and talking together many times.""Yes'm. That's so,...We've laughed together, and we've talked together, but we is just 'quaintances....You see, Miss Lucy and I,...we ain't never shed no tears. Folks got to cry together before dey is REAL friends." ...

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, is a REAL friend...He cries with us and cries for us...when we are hurt, when we are lost, when we are afraid...He knows us... He knows what our life is like...He was one of us...He lived it... He walked our walk...He knows all about the troubles, trials and tears that life can bring. ...That's why we need to remember His words..."As the Father loves me, I also love you."... Knowing that Jesus loves us with the same love that the Father loves Him., ...that love that carried Jesus through betrayal and torture and crucifixion...knowing that Jesus cries with us as a REAL friend... should bring us the joy He promised His friends in our Gospel: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."...Jesus wants us to experience His joy...the joy that comes from knowing that when we are hurting we can count on His love...His true friendship to get us thru.

Now friendship is always a 2-way street...Friends have expectations of one another and friendships will last as long as friends keep up their end of the bargain...So, what does Jesus expect of us if we are to be His friend?...He makes it pretty clear in our Gospel: "You are my friends if you do what I command You."...That seems like a pretty clear statement, but it could be misunderstood to mean that friendship with Jesus is about following a bunch of rules...when it's actually much simpler...We also just heard Jesus tell us: "This is my command, that You love one another as I love You."...**Jesus is saying, if You want to be my friend, You have to love my other friends the way I love You.**...That's it...Easy...A piece of cake, right? ...If we think so, we haven't really paid attention to what the Gospels tell us about the way Jesus loves.

First of all, whenever Jesus speaks about love, it's not the mushy-gushy emotional kind of love...Not even Jesus can command our emotions – they just happen...The love He commands of His friends is **agape'**...(Greek) Agape is the love Jesus modeled for us...love that is a choice,

not an emotion...It is the love that says, " I choose to do good for you...even if you don't deserve it...even if you don't thank me. ...even if you want nothing to do with me...even if I don't like what you do...even if you're my enemy ."

Agape is unconditional love. ..Agape is selfless love...Agape often requires sacrifice, and in some rare cases, the supreme sacrifice: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

...During the Viet N War, a small village had been bombarded with mortar shells... Some shells landed on an orphanage run by missionaries...killing the missionaries and a few children. ...Several other children were wounded,... including an 8-year-old girl who was bleeding heavily...She was in critical condition and needed an immediate blood transfusion...Now several of the uninjured children had the right blood type...So the doctor, using the little bit of Vietnamese language he knew and using sign language,...tried to explain to the frightened children that unless they could replace some of the girl's blood, she was going to die...The doctor asked if anyone would be willing to give blood to help her...The children all stood there silent, eyes looking down at the ground. ..After several awkward moments, a little hand went up slowly,...then back down,..then up again... "Oh, thank you!" the doctor exclaimed. "What is your name?"..."Huong," the boy replied....Huong was quickly laid on a table, his arm swabbed with alcohol, the needle carefully inserted into his vein... As the needle went in, Huong trembled, covered his face with his other hand and began sobbing.

"Does it hurt, Huong?" the doctor asked..Huong shook his head NO,... but he kept sobbing, ...tears trickling from his tightly closed eyes,...Something was very wrong. ...Just then a Vietnamese nurse arrived to help...She spoke to Huong in Vietnamese,...she listened to him, and stroked his forehead, and reassured him... After a few minutes, Huong stopped crying, and a look of relief spread over his face....The nurse then explained to the doctor,... "Huong misunderstood you. He thought he was going to die....He thought you asked him to give ALL his blood to save the little girl."..."But why would he be willing to do that?" asked the doctor...The nurse repeated the doctor's question to Huong, and he answered simply, "Because she is my friend."

Have you ever had a friend like that? ...At least one that I know of. It was on a hill called Calvary, outside the city wall, overlooking the town dump...It was there that your friend and my friend died so that we might live..."No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for 1's friends."

Here's the big question: I want Jesus to call me FRIEND,..but can I ever love the way He loves? I mean, come on, He's Jesus Christ, the Son of God...and it was hard enough for Him...It's gotta be impossible for you and me...But think about it,...look at the ones Jesus first chose for His friends:... impatient, hot-headed fishermen...a tax collector who swindled his own people... a zealot who wanted all the tax collectors dead...and even the man who would betray Him. ...Compared to that bunch, we don't look so bad....Jesus wouldn't have given us the command *love one another as I have loved you*, unless He knew we could do it...He sees in us what He saw in those first disciples – not just our weaknesses, our selfishness,...our judgmental, unforgiving hearts...He sees not what we are,..but what we can become...He knows we can't do it on our own, and so He sent us the Holy Spirit to empower us and guide us to love as Jesus loves.

I began by giving some descriptions of friendship. I'll end with one more. This one is from good old Charlie Brown who said, "A friend is someone who says nice things about you when you're not there." ...It kind of sounds like a eulogy...As you get older sometimes you think about what

someone might say about you when your time comes...I've thought about it a little...How will I be remembered?...I'll be more than content if, when the time comes, I am remembered as Jesus' FRIEND. How about you?...AMEN!