

May 10, 2015
John 15:9-17

Easter 6b
Our Greatest Friend is...

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Friends. There's a song that I learned as a camper and have cherished throughout my life. It's entitled "Friends". The first stanza says, "When you're alone and you're feeling so low. There is a friend there to tell the things you know. A friend will always be there, A friend will understand..." Friends! We all have them. Some of us have more friends than others. Some of us have a few close friends and lots of acquaintances. We all have one friend in common, the friend who we will be talking about this morning. The friend that we sang about in our first hymn this morning and the friend that we rejoiced in as we broke apart our sermon hymn into three parts this morning. What a joy it is to have Jesus as our friend!

As we think about friends today, there are people in our lives that love us as friends, they love us unconditionally. They love us no matter what! None of us would be without that person in our lives, it would be physically impossible for us to be here. These people in our lives are our mothers. Some of us still have our mothers with us on earth and others of us today grieve since our mothers are no longer with us on earth. Some of us even grieve because our mother's weren't very motherly towards us. Some of us grieve because our mother's didn't fulfill their vocation to us.

This happens in our human relationships our human friendships. We often fail in our vocations. Think about your vocation as friend. Have you always been there when your friends needed you the most? Have you ever failed in your responsibility as a friend? Jesus has 12 close friends, some of them were unfriendly and unfaithful. The Psalmist writes about Judas in Psalm 41:9 "*Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.*"¹ Think to Peter, James, and John...they went to sleep in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus asked them to pray and keep watch while Jesus prayed. Peter even denied his Lord three times.

In our text the command is to love. Don't we love our friends? Shouldn't our friends love us? We so often fail at this agape love. We have all been hurt by friends. We've all hurt our friends in the past. We've said things we shouldn't. We've done things we shouldn't. We've hurt them. Our friendship to each and to the Lord God is not perfect. Sometimes our friendship with each other is conditional. You've probably heard of this before... "You're my friend only if..." We've all heard of that before, said it yourself, or heard it personally. We put conditions on friendship, we even compete with others for friendships. Sometimes we even compare to see how many friends we have on Facebook.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Ps 41:9). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Friendships in this life are not perfect and they never will be. We do have that common friend, Jesus Christ, who indeed is our perfect friend. He says to us in our text: ¹² *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.* ¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.* ¹⁴ *You are my friends if you do what I command you.* ¹⁵ *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”* Jesus calls you and I friends. Jesus says that you and I are friends, but then He says, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” What is this? Isn’t this putting condition this friendship? DA Carson makes it clear for us: “Who then are his friends? *You are my friends if you do what I command.* This obedience is not what *makes* friends; it is what *characterizes* his friends.” He also writes: “But mutual, reciprocal friendship of the modern variety is not in view, and cannot be without demeaning God.” Reciprocal friendships is not the way God works.

When Jesus talks about calling His disciples friends, He doesn’t call them slaves or servants anymore because they will now know their Lord’s business. A slave or servant doesn’t know his master’s business. Here in John, Jesus is telling us that we are His friends because we know His business. They still take direction from their supreme Friend. We take direction from our Lord and Master through His Word.

Yet we fail, we don’t always do what He tells us to do. It’s true we have failed being His friend. We turn our backs on him. We run away from him, sometimes very far, but yet He still tells us...I CHOSE YOU! I LOVE YOU! He loves you and shows you His friendship of you by doing an *Extraordinary Thing*. Jesus Christ did an out of this world thing by doing the greatest thing a friend could ever do: giving up His life to save you. Kysar explains it this way: “On the human level the most extreme form of friendship is found in the life-giving sacrificial deed.” This is exactly what Jesus did for you: ¹³ *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*³ This someone that laid down his life for his friends is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ showed you what it is to be a true friend. He gave up everything for you.

By doing this *Extraordinary Thing* for you He has granted you with life. *Extraordinary Things* is what God is all about in our relationship with us. He does them for us all the time. There are many places that you can experience these *Extraordinary Things* from the friendship of God, of course we experience them right here in God’s House...more on that in a minute. He also provides other places as well, one of those places holds a special place in my heart, it’s a place where lifelong friendships are formed. It’s even the place where I first became connected with some of you, not knowing that God would bring us together here in this place. It’s Lutheran Island Camp, what a blessing that place has been in my life, it can also be a blessing in your life. You can experience the love of God in that place through the staff, the campers, volunteers, and anyone else

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Jn 15:12–15). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

³ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Jn 15:13). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

that crosses the causeway or steps foot onto the ChristServe Ranch. *Extraordinary Things* are seen in the deliberate steps of showing God's remarkable creation to sharing the gospel message of Jesus Christ.

Being friends of the King does provide us with *Extraordinary Things*. As we come into His presence in this place He continues to shower us with His blessings. Being a friend of the King, He allows us to know His plans and purposes. He even chooses each one of us to be His friend and appoints us to go and bear fruit, fruit that should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in His name, He may give it to you.

Being friends of the King means that He loves us unconditionally. He loves us with that deep sacrificial agape love. He loves us with His actions. He loves us with His words. He loves us by doing things for us, by sacrificing things for us. He sacrificed His home in heaven to come down and live with us on earth for a time. He sacrificed Himself by becoming one of us...a human, while being fully God. He eventually took His love for us and sacrificed Himself for us on the cross. What an *Extraordinary Thing* He did for us on the cross and the empty tomb.

He continues to show His friendship to us, His Love for us in the *Extraordinary Things* in the Divine Service, through remembering Your Baptism, through receiving forgiveness of your sin, through hearing and receiving His Word. He personally comes to you through the *Extraordinary Things* of His Body and Blood in, with, and under the bread and wine for the forgiveness for your sins.

My dear friends of Christ, Jesus Loves you with a perfect love. Even though you and I can never love with a perfect sacrificial agape love, because you and I are sinners. Jesus Christ will always love you. He will continue to give you the good gifts, and because of receiving those gifts from Him you are able to love others, you are able to be friends of the King.

You and I can never live up to the command that Christ gave to His disciples on Maundy Thursday, "Love as I have loved you." We can never keep the commands of Christ in order to be His friends, so He kept those commands Himself in our stead, went to the cross to forgive you your sins. He gave up His life for you and then took it up again, so that you and I can forever and always be friends of the King.

He gave up His life and took it up again so that He can grant you life, eternal life that is even already now being granted to you through your baptisms, through forgiveness of your sins, and through the Lord's Supper, eternal life that also awaits you in the resurrection of all flesh. A resurrection that He began at His resurrection on that first Easter Morning.

Dear friends in Christ, Jesus Christ loves you with a love will never stop loving, never stop forgiving, never stop doing things for your benefit. He's our friend no matter what. The last stanza to the song "Friends" goes like this... "Jesus is our friend, He's the very best we know. He died for our sins and made us as white as snow. So live your life for

him, Cause He gave His life for you! And I thank you, I thank you God, for Jesus my friend! I thank you I thank you God, for Jesus my Friend, with me to stay.”

In Jesus Name. Alleluia! Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus your Risen Lord and Savior. Amen.