

John 15-12-17
May 7th (2023)
Friends of Jesus!

Preamble:

Prayer for illumination:

Sermon introduction:

In his book *Loneliness, the Search for Intimacy*, author Craig W. Ellison writes,

“Loneliness seems to have flooded the lives of millions of modern Americans. It's an emotional epidemic. A survey of over 40,000 respondents of all ages found that 67 percent of them felt lonely... Projected nationally, that amounts to over 150 million Americans who personally experienced loneliness.

Another survey found that over 64 percent of widows over age 50 in several major urban areas mentioned loneliness as a significant problem in their lives.

The United Methodist established a nationwide 24-hour, toll-free telephone line for people wanting prayer. Loneliness was the most frequently mentioned prayer.

Contact, a nationwide crisis intervention telephone network, received over 18,000 calls due to intense loneliness in one recent six-month period.” (K. Hughes)

This data is a few decades old. Yet, the loneliness epidemic has gotten worse not better. Some people would cut off their right arm for a close friend. Maybe you have experienced loneliness recently?

Here is some amazingly good news for lonely people. Jesus wants to be your friend.

This brings us to John 15:12-17. In these amazing verses, we learn that Jesus is the friend of sinners. This raises an important question—is Jesus your friend? How do we know if we are friends with Jesus? What are the signs that one is a friend of Jesus? Some claim to be his friends, but they are deceived. Hopefully you are not deceived about being friends with Jesus, but in a crowd this size a few of you may be deceived.

Proposition: Our text describes four things that are true of Jesus friends.

Jesus friends love each other.

Jesus friends obey his commands.

Jesus friends know the truth.

Jesus friends are chosen by Jesus.

First, Jesus friends love each other.

How do they love each other? By laying down their lives!

John 15:12–13 (ESV) — 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.

Jesus friends love each other. Jesus commands his friends to love one another. In this particular context, he is telling the disciples to love the other disciples. In other words, this is a command to love

Christians. But how are we supposed to love the saints? By laying down our lives for them. Since this is how Christ loved us.

Real friends, true friends, are willing to lay down their lives for their friends.

Illustration:

Look up story of love in the book of amazing stories...

Shortly after Charles Colson was released from prison, he gave a speech at an Ivy League school. As he began his address, a group of students began heckling him and interrupted his speech. They shouted, "How could you have defended Richard Nixon?" Finally, Colson stopped his speech, looked at the hecklers, and said, "I defended him because he was my friend." Instantly the other students were on their feet, applauding, because Colson struck a nerve with that comment. He understood that in this wasteland of broken relationships in which we live today, every one of those students was longing to have at least one friend who would sacrifice on his or her behalf. (Sproul)

One day while he was a fugitive, King David was near Bethlehem, his home city, and he longed for a drink of water from the well by the gate. Three of his mighty men were close enough to David to hear his desire for Bethlehem water. So, a short time later, they snuck down to Bethlehem, through enemy territory, risking their lives to get David some water. They sacrificed for their friend. (2 Sam. 23:15–17).

Application:

Friends, good friends, the friends of Jesus, are willing to lay down their lives for their friends.

This must start in the home.

Husbands are you willing to lay down your life for your wife? After all, she should be your closet friend.

If she says she needs more physical affection or more talk time, are you willing to give it?

If she says she needs more spending money, are you willing to take less?

If she is begging you to pray with her or lead the family in family worship, or take a more active role in discipling the kids, are you willing to lay down your life and do these things?

When your children need more of your time...

When your friend needs help putting on a new roof...

When your friend needs help moving...

When your friend needs some money...

A friend of mine recently offered to help me fix my fence even though he had plenty to do at his house...

How do Jesus friends love each other? By laying down their lives!

Why do Jesus friends love each other? They have been loved!

John 15:12–13 (ESV) — 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.

Jesus tells us to love our friends as he has loved us. How has he loved us? He loved us by going to the cross and laying down his life for us.

1 John 4:10–11 (ESV) — 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Jesus loved us so much that he suffered and died on the cross, absorbing the father's wrath, so that we could be forgiven of all our sins.

According to the Apostle Paul, this love is so amazing, so divine, that it surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:19).

What makes Christ love so amazing? Consider a few things...

We are way below him in status.

In addition, he did not have to die for us.

Furthermore, we were not his friends when he died for us, we were rebels (Rom. 5:8).

Finally, his death was not a normal death. He suffered intense physical, emotional, and psychological anguish on the cross...

Application:

Christ's friends lay down their lives for others, since Christ lay down his life for them.

We don't love others to get God to love us, we love others because God demonstrated his love for us in the cross.

Here is the thing, there are probably some people at GCF that are harder to love than others. Maybe I'm one of them. Maybe someone annoys you, rubs you the wrong way, or wounded you somehow. I get it, we are all sinners. But Christ loved us when we were very unlovable, as a result we must love others when they are unlovable.

If you find it hard to love others, think about the cross.

How are we going to find the strength to love this way? In last week's text, John 15:1-11, we learn that we can obey Christ's commands by abiding in Christ. His strength can flow through us, helping us to lay down our lives for others.

First, Jesus' friends love each other.

Second, Jesus' friends obey his commands.

John 15:14 (ESV) — 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

The test of friendship with Christ is obedience to Christ's commands.

Matthew 7:21 (ESV) — 21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Jesus says that his friends obey his commands. Implying that if you don't obey his commands, you are not his friend.

Illustration:

I recently heard a story about a lady who approached her pastor's wife and said, "I want to get divorced." The pastor's wife listened carefully and then said, "why do you want to get divorced?" The distraught lady said, "I want to get divorced because my husband refuses to pick up his socks." The pastor's wife said, "Let me get this straight, you want to get divorced because your husband does not pick up his socks?" "Yes!" She said. "I'm sorry but that is not biblical grounds for divorce." Said the pastor's wife. The distraught lady responded, "I know, I know, but I have asked him for 20 years to pick up his socks and he refuses to comply with this simple request, which means that he does not care at all about my desires. He does not care about pleasing me. He only cares about himself." She said.

I don't think this lady has grounds for divorce, but it sounds like her husband is a jerk who does not care about her desires. How do we know, this lady has been asking him to pick up his socks for twenty years and he refuses. Refusing to pick up socks is not the issue. The issue is this man's refusal to consider his wife's desires.

Application:

How do you think Jesus feels when we ignore his commands for ten, twenty, or forty years? If someone repeatedly ignores Christ commands, how can they still call themselves the friends of Jesus?

Luke 6:46 (ESV) — 46 "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"

What are his commands? All his commands are summarized in the two great commandments. The first commandment is to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and the second commandment is to love our neighbor as self. If we are not willing to at least try to obey these commands, Jesus tells us to stop calling him lord and friend.

John 15:14 (ESV) — 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

Are there any commands of Christ that you are not willing to obey right now?

Objection—what about grace? Obedience is not what makes us Jesus' friends, but obedience is what characterizes Jesus' friends. Jesus' friends lives are marked by obedience to Jesus commands.

Said another way, our obedience to Christ's commands can never ever make us Christians. It is grace alone through faith alone that makes us Christians. But saving faith always obeys. Saving faith loves, we obey Christ because we love him.

What are Jesus' friends like?

*Jesus friends love each other.
Jesus friends obey his commands.*

Third, Jesus friends know the truth.

John 15:15 (ESV) — 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,

Let's pause here, and revel in this for a moment...

These verses teach us the astonishing truth that Jesus is friends with human beings. Why is this so amazing? Jesus is God.

Since he is God, he is far above us.

Isaiah 55:8–9 (ESV) — 8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. **9** For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Even today, it is not normal for people to be best friends with people that are far above them in station, position, or class.

The street sweeper is probably not going to be best friends with the King or Queen of England.

The barista is probably not going to be best friends with a five-star general or the president of the USA.

The janitor at the Apple computer headquarters building is probably not going to be best friends with the CEO of Apple.

No person is higher above us than Jesus Christ.

He is God almighty.

He is the creator of all things.

He is the sustainer of all things.

He controls every single detail of world history.

He is all powerful, all wise, and all knowing.

He is holy, righteous, pure, and just.

And he wants to be friends with us—mere mortals who are so infinitesimally small that in the grand scheme of the cosmos, that we can't even be measured.

Notice that Jesus says,

“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends.” (v. 15)

He is not saying, “we are no longer his servants.” The apostle Paul and the apostle Peter both refer to themselves as servants of Christ, and so should we.

But he is making the point that we are more than servants, we are friends. And since we are friends, he is going to reveal his ways to us. Isn't this what good friends do?

John 15:15 (ESV) — 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.

We are confidants and companions with Jesus. So much so, that he is willing to make known to us all that he has heard from his divine father. Wow!!! He is willing to open his heart and soul to us, human beings.

Illustration:

Elon Musk is the CEO of Tesla Motor Company and currently worth 188 billion, making him the second wealthiest person in the world. He has wealth, power, influence, and charisma (and he is a little nuts).

Imagine that Elon Musk called you on the phone last week and said, “Joe or Sally, I want to buy you dinner at Churchill’s steak house in downtown Spokane. Over dinner I want to tell you about my plans for Tesla Motor Company and SpaceX. I have some ideas that no one else knows about yet, but I want to share them with you. Would you be willing to hear about me out? Maybe you are wondering, why I want to share this information with you? It is simple, I want to be your friend. Would you be my friend?

How would you feel after having this conversation with Elon? Flattered, overwhelmed, amazed, probably loved! You would probably think, why me?

Application:

Yet, Elon Musk is a mortal, who will be forgotten in 500 years. But Jesus Christ is the maker of all things, and he wants this kind of relationship with us.

One scholar writes,

Friends bare their souls, and Jesus has opened his mind to us in the Scriptures. Through God’s Word, Paul said, “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). Friends will often spend long hours sharing ideas and talking about their plans for the future, and Jesus wants to do this with us. Some of us have diaries in which our most cherished thoughts are kept secure. This is what Jesus has given to us in the Bible, with faith as the key to open it. The Bible is not only the holy book for us to revere, but also Jesus’ disclosure of his own heart for us to treasure as his friends. (Philips)

Jesus wants to be your friend.

He wants to share his thoughts with you.

He wants to hear about your thoughts, goals, dreams, ambitions, and fears.

He wants to rescue us from loneliness, isolation, and despair.

He wants to be with us.

Amazing!!!

What are Jesus’ friends like?

Jesus friends love each other.

Jesus friends obey his commands.

Jesus friends know the truth.

Fourth, Jesus friends are chosen by Jesus.

John 15:16 (ESV) — 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Jesus wants to remind his disciples, and us, who chose who. Why? To keep them, and to keep us humble. We are not Christians because we are smarter, more spiritual, or wiser than others. We are Christians

because Jesus chose us to be Christians. This theme comes up again and again in the gospel of John (See John 6 and John 10).

Why did God choose us? Not because he saw anything good in us (Rom. 9, Eph. 2). He chose us because he loves us and wants to be our friend. That's it. Amazing!!! Instead of arguing about the doctrines of election and predestination, we should rejoice that God chose us to be his friend.

Aren't you flattered when someone else initiates a relationship with you? Especially a famous or powerful person. How much more encouraged should we be when we hear that God initiated a relationship with us. And it was planned thousands of years ago.

But I decided to follow Jesus. I'm sure you did. But that decision was based on God's prior decision for you. He chose you first, enabling you to choose him.

Have you thanked him recently?

He not only chose us to be his friend, but he also chose us to bear fruit.

John 15:16 (ESV) — 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

God chose us to be his friends and he chose us to bear fruit (Gal. 5:22ff). He chose you to bear spiritual fruit so that he would be glorified through your life (Eph. 2:10).

Application:

Sometimes our inability to bear good fruit is discouraging, isn't it? We get overwhelmed, don't we? We are often much more aware of the rotten fruit in our lives than the fruit of the Spirit. In those moments, we must remember that before the foundation of the world Jesus chose us to be his friends and he chose us to bear fruit. This means that we will bear fruit. This is God's plan for us, and he will help us with the task. He wants us to succeed because his glory is at stake. Furthermore, he wants us to succeed in bearing fruit because he is our friend.

Next time you are tempted, ask Jesus for help. He chose you to bear fruit.

Conclusion:

In closing let me ask you a question. Who is your best friend?

If you have been around for a while, you know that friends come and go.

A best friend may move away (Brent Webster).

Another friendship may grow cold for no apparent reason.

Still another friendship might allow bitterness and misunderstanding to creep in.

Friendships are hard on this side of Eden, aren't they?

Yet, no matter what happens to our earthly friends, we can be friends with Jesus, the maker of all things. This friend will never leave us or forsake us. This friend always has our best interest in mind. And this friend will be with us forever.

Is Jesus your friend? Let's pray.