



Best Friends



A Sermon By
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Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

*An audio version of this sermon can be found at on the Grace Church website at
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/2016-03-13-AWW.mp3>.*

Best Friends

Luke 4:1-13

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The Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 13, 2016

After his baptism, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil.

Luke 4:1

One of my very best friends in the world was, and is, and always will be my college roommate. We lived together our freshman year when we were assigned the same room, and the two of us got along so well, there was never any reason to switch and live with someone else.

My roommate was everything you would want in a friend. He was honest, genuine, dependable, accepting and non-judgmental. From the beginning, he was willing to take me at face value, with all my oddities and foibles, and I knew I could always count on him. We also had the same interests and the same sense of humor. The two of us had so much fun doing all those stupid and crazy things that college students do, all those things you tell your own children NOT to do when they go off to college...

After graduation, my roommate and I continued to see each other as often as possible. We even served as groomsmen at each other's wedding, but then, he and his wife moved to Alaska where they have lived for the last 20 or 25 years. I have not seen my roommate in all that time; but, every once and a while we talk on the phone; and, when we do, it is like nothing has ever changed. We immediately fall into the same, old banter as we talk about our wives and kids and work. One of us almost always says, "Remember when we..." and we end up laughing until it hurts. No matter how long it has been since our last phone call, the conversations are never awkward or stilted. They just flow naturally, because we know each other that well and we have that deep connection.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature," and I think he was right.

Like all of us, Jesus had many friends during the course of his life. Although we know very little about his childhood and youth, we have to presume he had friends with whom he played and grew up, maybe even got into a little trouble. When he left home to begin his ministry, Jesus met lots of other people as he travelled the countryside, and many of them became friends. There were the twelve disciples, and particularly Peter, James, and John, the first disciples whom he called and who seemed to comprise Jesus' inner circle. Jesus was close to several women like

Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna who provided for him out of their resources. And, in today's reading from the Gospel of John, we meet three of his other very close friends.

Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus lived in the small town of Bethany, about two miles from Jerusalem, and according to the Gospels, Jesus visited them several times during his ministry. Their house was a home away from home for Jesus, a place where he could go to rest and relax, and escape the crowds, which were constantly pressing in upon him. Martha would serve him dinner. He had roof over his head. It was quiet and peaceful, so Jesus was able to recharge his batteries before going back out on the road. In other words, Mary, Martha and Lazarus did what friends do, and when the Bible says Jesus loved them, it is easy to understand why.

Despite their friendship, and all the others he had, Jesus was, and is, always looking for new friends. When Jesus met his first disciples and they wondered who he was, he said, "Come and see," and that invitation is open to all of us. Jesus longs to have a relationship with us. He wants us to know us and have us know him, really know him, as well or even better than we know any of our other friends. Jesus wishes to be our best friend, and he promises to always be with us, doing all of those things that best friends do: listening to us, giving to us, encouraging us, supporting us, loving us not matter what.

It is like the old hymn says:

*What a friend we have in Jesus,
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer.*

Friendship, though, are a two way street. There has to be a certain intentionality to friendships because they take time and effort. Both people have to want a relationship and make a conscious commitment to it, if the friendship is going to work. There has to be a give-and-take, a back-and-forth for the friendship to be nurtured and sustained.

As we all know, there are all kinds of friends, and not just good friends. There are friends who are constantly too busy, always running around doing this and doing that, they never seem to have time for us. There are "foxhole" friends, who only reach out when something happens and they need something from us. And, there are friends who are fake. People who say they are our friends and act like they are our friends when we are around, but when we are not around, they do things and say things behind our back that are not right.

Most of us have probably had friends like these, and none of us want to be these kinds of friends. But, we have to admit sometimes we act these ways in our relationship with Jesus. We are not always as good a friend to Jesus as we might be. We are not always dependable and accepting.

We do not always open our heart to Jesus and invite him in to sit at our table. We do not always spend enough time with Jesus, listening to Jesus, doing all those things to nurture and sustain our relationship.

The good news is there is always time to change all that. Right now, during this season of Lent, we can recommit to being the best friend to Jesus we can be, and Jesus makes it easy for us because he is just waiting for us. He is waiting by the phone, waiting for us to call, and he will tell us what to do: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul, and love your neighbor as yourself.

Just as Jesus cares for us, it is important we care for Jesus in the world. Jesus hopes we will go out into the world and continue his work, giving up a little bit of ourselves to put others first, lift others up, to speak nicely to one another and bring people together rather push people apart. That is how we show our love for Jesus, by doing things best friends do, for people who are not our best friend.

This past week, I came across a few verses that were apparently written on the wall of Mother Teresa's home for children in Calcutta. They speak to the meaning of being Christ's friend, even in the midst of this world in which we live, and they go like this:

If people are unreasonable, illogical and self-centered, forgive them anyway. If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway. If you are successful, you may win some false friends and some true enemies. Be successful anyway. What you spend years building, some could destroy overnight. Build anyway. If you find serenity and happiness, others may be jealous. Be happy anyway. The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow. Do good anyway. Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough. Give the world your best anyway.

One week from today, we will enter into Holy Week, walking with Jesus during the last days of his life, and we will remember once again just how much he loves us. As it says in the Bible, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." In the meantime, no matter what the world throws at you, no matter what comes your way, be His best friend anyway.

Amen.