

***Messages of Love and Friendship***  
***John 15:9-17***  
***9 May 2021***  
***Christian Family Sunday***  
***Sermon by Rev. Jessica McCrae***

Last week as my mom was cleaning out her closet she found an old chocolate box in which my Grandma kept all her treasures – there were beautiful old cards from her bridal shower and wedding in 1941, some homemade lace, Irish linen hankies, and an autograph book from her last year in high school in 1937. We had so much fun reading the autographs. Two of my great great grandparents wrote in it. My Great Great Grandma Ward wrote “In walking down the streets of time five things observe with care, of whom you speak, to whom you speak, how, when and where.” And my Great Great Grandpa Ward wrote “Dear Blanche, Love many, trust few, always paddle your own canoe.” All sage advice! The pages are filled with it, from family and so many friends. As I read everything that was written I can’t help but wonder what happened to some of her friends. There are some I know well, girls who eventually became my great aunts and whose granddaughters, my cousins now, I am still in touch with. But others, who wrote so fondly of my grandma, who were so close so

many years ago, were lost “to the streets of time”, as my Great Great Grandma Ward might say.

Friendship is a strange and wonderful thing. We banter that word “friend” around a lot without really thinking too much about the meaning, just like we banter around the word love I suppose. They are powerful words, and finding a true friend, like true love, is a rare and blessed thing indeed.

Today Jesus, in between washing feet, the description of the betrayal that is to come and his arrest, calls us friends. We are no longer called servants because he is sharing so much of what is to come with us. He is promising to never really leave us alone, even when the very worst is done to him. Because we are friends. But what does that mean exactly, what does it mean for Jesus, our Saviour, to call us friends?

When you first begin to reflect on it you might have feelings of unworthiness. Which is understandable. After all in the world we work at friendship, we have to put in effort to establish the friendship and nurture it and learn and grow within it. We earn our friendships by the love and care and attention we put into that relationship. So to hear Jesus call us friends, when we can think of so many times we

have not lived up to our calling, when we have put ourselves before others, and before God, when we have sinned, it can all be a bit overwhelming. So why does Jesus call us friends? Well first and foremost, because of love.

Today, again, we are reminded first that we are beloved, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.” Today Jesus gives us assurances of love and support, so that we can begin to more deeply understand this relationship we have with him. Whether you are new to this journey of faith or whether you have been in relationship with Christ your whole life, this is something you need to know, something you need to be reminded of – our relationship with Jesus exists because of his great love for us. There is nothing we have done and nothing we can ever do to earn this. The relationship and the grace in that relationship is ours because of God’s unfathomable love for us.

And the amazing thing about this relationship, about this love is that it is not a love that exists separate and apart from this world. It is not a love that is socially distanced. It is a love that flows in and through us and is present with us every step of this journey. It is a love that was on full display when God came to us in Jesus, to

experience this life and walk this human road with us. Jesus said that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for their friends. And we experienced that too, in the death and resurrection of Jesus, in the embodied faith that nothing, not even death, can overpower the strength of Christ's love for us.

This is a relationship build solely and entirely on love.

So then what does it mean to be friends. Well, we experience lots of kinds of friendships in our lives and if we are fortunate enough have many friends in our lives. But most of us, when we think about it, while we may have many acquaintance friends, have only a handful, or perhaps even just one good true deep friendship. And that friendship, that relationship changes us. The people we choose to spend the bulk of our time with, the people we invite into our lives in deep and profound ways change us, for better or for worse. People say that we are judged by the people we keep around us, well we are also transformed by the ones we keep around us too.

So when Jesus says we are friends, it is an invitation. It is an invitation to come as we are, imperfect, human sinners and saints, and enter into relationship knowing that it will change us, knowing that in ways we can barely imagine, his love will transform us. But

the challenge for us is that it can all feel a bit esoteric at times. It isn't like it was for Jesus' friends, for his disciples when they could sit with him and be taught by him and touch him and travel with him. We are missing his physical presence and instead rely on the Spirit to fill us, rely on the teachings and the hope that Jesus gave us, and rely on our community of faith to give us a glimpse of that embodied love.

That is why we gather in church community, that is why even in this pandemic when we must gather virtually or through telephone we do it, because we are hungry for that connection, for that reminder of embodied love. We want this relationship with Jesus, and we want to be around others who want this relationship too. We have made the choice to abide in God, or if you are just starting to join us for worship, maybe you are at the point when you want to explore a little more what that means, to abide in God's love, to be in relationship with Jesus. We have hear a whisper, felt a nudge and have decided to welcome the call in our lives and to commit to, or consider committing ourselves to, a community where we can walk together, learn together, and show love to one another and to our wider world. We want to be impacted by this friendship – by the one we have with Jesus and the one we have with other people of faith.

Those of us who are long time disciples, long time Christians, we welcome those of you who are just dipping your toes in this life of faith, who are only on the margins of this new relationship with Jesus. And when we welcome others and support those who are seeking we are saying that we believe this love that we've been shown, this friendship that we have been invited into with Jesus, is life changing. It is world changing. And we are saying we're happy you want to be a part of it, that we will love each other into this full relationship and that together we will learn what it means to abide in Jesus. Even in these changing times. Especially in these changing times. We are saying that we believe this relationship with have with Christ, and the relationship that we are open to with each other in community is something that will, in Jesus' words, "make our joy complete".

Because when we gather to listen to the scriptures, when we gather at this table, we are saying that not only do we welcome this offer of friendship, not only do we want to be changed and transformed by this love and hope, but we are also saying we want to share this hope and joy in our world, too. We are saying that we want to live beyond ourselves and that we want to grow in love for our neighbour, for our friends. We are acknowledging that this life is

bigger than our wants alone, and we are acknowledging that we don't ever want to walk this path alone.

The Christian path is not a solitary path. As Jesus reminds us today we need one another, we need community in which to grow and learn and share our love. But it comes with responsibility too. Once we are in community we need to pray, for one another and for ourselves that we may have the wisdom to treat one another with love and respect. That we may be open to all that God seeks for us to learn from one another, and teach one another. So that we don't just accept where we are today and stop, but we commit to growing, in love and wisdom, in relationship with one another, so that our joy may be complete.

On this Christian Family Sunday as we prepare to gather together yet apart in these strange and changing times, let us recommit to this relationship with Jesus and with each other. We are offered, again and again, real relationship with our God, true friendship with Jesus that involves love and challenge, encouragement and calling – that time will only strengthen. How blessed we are. So, let us love one another as we have been loved, and let us answer the call given to each of us – let us walk together,

abiding in Christ, loving our neighbours, building community, and opening ourselves to joy, complete. Knowing that we are never alone.