

Mt Albert Baptist Church

Series: QUEST

Topic: Deep Friendship

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"My friends are my estate. Forgive me then the avarice to hoard them."
- Emily Dickinson

There is lots to say about our topic for today - friendship. As you look into the depths of it, it becomes evident very quickly that rather than one aspect of a series; it could be a series in itself.

It would be an odd thing for someone to say: "I don't have any friends. Not even one". What **is** the big deal about relationships? ... Why do we have this QUEST for deep friendship?

We'll need to go way back to find our answer:

Gen 1:1 says: "In the beginning the earth was dark and without form...."

Well, maybe that's a bit too far back.

Let's skip to v26. "...and God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness".

That is where it all started.

God intended it. God chose to create another being who He can befriend and have a relationship with. But that is only part of the answer.

Our craving for deep, intimate relationships is because we are made in the **likeness** of God.

What does that mean?

When we take a picture it is a copy or a resemblance of the real thing. It is **not** the original, but **like** the original. When Adam was created he couldn't claim to be a god, but he could claim to be like God. Obviously after the fall that kind of went out the window.

Ok, so Adam (and therefore all of mankind) was created to be **like** God. We've all heard this statement before: "you are just like your father / mother! Obviously what they mean is that you are displaying a specific characteristic of that person.

So, to be created in the likeness of God is to display a specific trait of God.

God, being Father and Son and Spirit is in relationship with each other. The desire for deep friendship is because God made it part of our DNA. It is a trait we are born with because it is a characteristic of God and we are made in His likeness.

It sounds reasonably straight forward, but of course there is the issue of sin, which messed things up in a big way.

So the intimate relationship, the deep friendship God had with Adam becomes a spoiled, long-distant relationship affecting all subsequent relationships.

But God loved us...

...and His love overshadowed His disappointment...

and so He sent Jesus.

Listen to Romans 5:8

"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still

sinners, Christ died for us.”

Go back about 2000 years. It was Passover. Jesus was in Jerusalem where He sat in a room having dinner with His disciples. These 12 men spent 3 ½ years with Him. He knew them intimately and He loved them deeply. In the 24 hours that followed, Jesus gave a comprehensive demonstration of the full extend of His love; not only for them, but for every single human being.

It started when Jesus got up from where He was sitting and started to wash His disciples’ feet. This freaked them out and Peter even tried to stop Him. You see, feet-washing was something that servants would have done. Jesus was their Teacher and more than that the disciples believed He came from God and that’s why this was such an unthinkable thing to do. Jesus then told them to follow His example and serve each other in their daily lives.

Afterwards, Jesus sat back down at the table. He told His friends many things about how to live and about what was going to happen. They didn’t quite get everything He was saying, but even then, when Jesus was standing face to face with death, knowing what was about to happen to Him, He encouraged them. He prayed. He prayed for Himself, His disciples and this is fabulous, He prayed for all believers, that means even for you and me!

At the end of the evening they all left the house and went to Gethsemane. Later, the Son of God was arrested, mocked, beaten and nailed to a cross. He hung there in agony until finally He died. Why? Because of God’s love for every single individual and His desire to restore a broken relationship.

I encourage you to read this amazing, detailed story for yourself in

John 13-19.

How did these 12 men become friends of Jesus?

Amos 3:3 poses this question: “Can two walk together, unless they have agreed to do so”?

3 ½ years before Jesus died on a cross, He invited 12 men to become friends with Him ... His invitation was simply this: “Follow Me”. They had a choice. They could have shrugged Him off or they could have agreed to walk together with Him. They agreed.

Friendship is an unwritten agreement between two people with a common interest.

Friends agree to ‘do life’ together. This agreement involves several things.

The Webster’s dictionary defines a friend as one who is **attached** to another by **affection**; one who **entertains** for another sentiments of **esteem, respect and affection**, which lead him to **desire** his **company**, and to seek to **promote** his **happiness and prosperity**.

According to this definition the agreement between friends involve the following:

friends are emotionally involved with each other,
they have good opinions of each other,
they enjoy spending time together, and
they encourage each other.

What is important to one will be important to the other. What brings one joy, will make the other glad. What makes one cry will also hurt the other. Friends enter into an unspoken covenant with each other to share their lives together... because they want to.

I really like this clip from the movie: Shall we dance? Susan Sarandon speaks about marriage, but I think this applies to any deep relationship.

play clip

“We need a witness to our lives. There's a billion people on the planet... I mean, what does any one life really mean? But in relationship [marriage], you're promising to care about everything. The good things, the bad things, the terrible things, the mundane things... all of it, all of the time, every day. You're saying 'Your life will not go unnoticed because I will notice it. Your life will not go un-witnessed because I will be your witness'.”

What a beautiful way of looking at friendship as a witness to someone's life.

One of the things Jesus told His disciples that night is the **heart** of this covenant between friends. It is beautifully captured in John 15 and a continuation of last week's passage that Judy read:

Here it is from the NIV:

John 15:12-15

“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

“The Message” translation puts it this way:

This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. You are my friends when you do the things I command you. I'm no longer calling you servants because servants don't understand what

their master is thinking and planning. No, I've named you friends because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father.

The three points I want to focus on here are:

The command to love
Your life on the line and
Letting others in

LOVE COMES FIRST

The command to love:

In verse 12, Jesus commanded His disciples (and us) to Love each other as He has loved them.

I think it is important though to include what He said just a bit before that in verse 9:

Jesus said: “As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you: abide in My love”.

Jesus told His disciples to follow His example. The Father has loved Him, in return He has loved them, now they must love each other. Jesus commands nothing that He hasn't displayed in practice. Love flows out of love as we read in 1 John 4:19. “We love because He first loved us”.

Jesus is very serious about this. He even labours this point. Let's have a look at a few passages that talk about this command to love each other:

You are my friends if you do what I command (to love one another). – John 15:14

We love because He first loved us. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. - 1 John 4 :19 – 21

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. - John 13 :34-35

Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 'This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. 'All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." – Matt 22 : 37-40

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. 'The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself. 'There is no commandment greater than these." – Mark 12: 29-31

It is really very clear. God expects us to love others if we claim to love Him. He loved us first. Christ proved His love by washing His disciples' feet and dying on a cross for billions of individuals – not just for His friends, but for people He knew would deny Him anyway.

And so it is for us who claim to follow Jesus, This will be the proof of our love for Him and our obedience to Him if we continue in that Love and love each other.

I really like this quote from Mother Theresa that ties in so beautifully with this: "If you judge people, you have no time to love them." I would like to flip it around though. "If you truly love people, you have no time to judge them".

HOW ARE WE TO LOVE?

Your life on the line:

From the Message:

J15:13 "This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends."

And from the NIV:

"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

In western society we just don't see this in practice... literally laying one's life down or DYING for someone else. I'm sure we are grateful for this too.

So if we don't actually die for others, how does this apply to our lives today?

The answer is found in Romans 12: 9, 10:

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves."

Or as Paul so eloquently puts it in Philippians 2:3 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves".

The idea is that we put our friends before ourselves, living our lives serving others as we see in Matthew 20:28

"... just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Simply put then; friends love and serve each other and do so without

ulterior motive.

What is the practical application of this kind of friendship though?

"A friend is one who strengthens you with prayers, blesses you with love and encourages you with hope." – unknown

The most recent example I have was during the last week as I was preparing for this talk: You can imagine that it takes an hour or 20 to pray, research, make notes, refine and get to the final product of a sermon. I don't have an office at church dedicated to the knitting together of talks, so how did I do it with all the duties of 'every day life'? I did it with a little help from my friends.

I had friends praying for me and texting me with encouraging words. Blayne and my Mum took so much off my hands by cooking, doing the laundry, cleaning the house, and making me plenty cups of tea! Lydia and Aaron were very patient with me while I spent a lot of time in front of my computer. A couple of nights ago, we went for dinner to some friends'. After dinner I plonked myself down in front of my friend's computer and I spent the rest of our 'visit' their working on my sermon. I even got rewarded for my absence in the living room with a cup of coffee!! My friends and my family might have liked to spend more time with me, but they all put me before themselves so I could work and I am deeply grateful for that!

What about you? Consider for a moment how you've been put before others recently.. Or how your love is evident in other people's lives... Now there might be some here who are thinking: "I've been hurt by friends, even by family". I have said those words myself. Here is our answer in a quote from Mother Theresa:

"People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway. If you do good, people may accuse you of selfish motives. Do good anyway. If you are successful, you may win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway. The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway. Honesty and transparency make you vulnerable. Be honest and transparent anyway. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway. People who really want help may attack you if you help them. Help them anyway. Give the world the best you have and you may get hurt. Give the world your best anyway."

Jesus knew, even before He willingly died on that cross, that many, many people would reject Him and **never** benefit from His sacrifice. Jesus died anyway!

The last point is:

THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Letting others 'in':

In John 15:15 Jesus made this statement:

"I'm no longer calling you servants because servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I've named you friends because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father."

Friends share things; they let each other in on what's going on in their lives. They share their dreams, fears, and even their struggles with each other. They talk and tell each other where they are at. Even close friends who can often ascertain that 'something is up' with you with just a look – even they cannot read minds. We cannot expect our friends to 'just know'. We need to let them in. If we have a need,

we need to make it known...that way we will benefit from their desire to encourage us.

While living in Johannesburg I had a friendship with a young woman. It was a strange and intense relationship where we evaluated our friendship on a weekly basis. It was kind of weird and exhausting, but what I found most frustrating about that friendship was that it was so lopsided. She was happy to help out, to do stuff for me, to listen when I struggled or to be a shoulder to cry on, BUT she was unwilling to share any of herself with me. She wouldn't let me be there for her. No ways was she going to let me in.

That is not a friendship. It is a dependency, a need to be needed and an unwillingness to trust and make yourself vulnerable... it is based on fear and pride. It says to the other person, I don't need you and I don't trust you enough to tell you about myself.

Friends aren't only there for each other, but they allow others to be there for them.

Let us encourage **each other** in love, because God loved us first.

In closing, "Lean on me" by Bill Withers is one of my favourite songs and describes friendship beautifully.

Sometimes in our lives we all have pain
 We all have sorrow
 But if we are wise
 We know that there's always tomorrow
 Lean on me, when you're not strong
 And I'll be your friend
 I'll help you carry on
 For it won't be long
 'Til I'm gonna need
 Somebody to lean on

Please swallow your pride
 If I have things you need to borrow
 For no one can fill those of your needs
 That you don't let show
 Lean on me, when you're not strong
 And I'll be your friend
 I'll help you carry on
 For it won't be long
 'Til I'm gonna need
 Somebody to lean on
 If there is a load you have to bear
 That you can't carry
 I'm right up the road
 I'll share your load
 If you just call me
 So just call on me brother, when you need a hand
 We all need somebody to lean on
 I just might have a problem that you'd understand
 We all need somebody to lean on
 Lean on me when you're not strong
 And I'll be your friend
 I'll help you carry on
 For it won't be long
 Till I'm gonna need
 Somebody to lean on