



Sunday 9th May – Friend of God

PREPARATION

Welcome

Leader Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you

All and also with you.

Leader This is the day that the Lord has made.

All Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Hymn Give thanks with a grateful heart

Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One;
give thanks, because he's given
Jesus Christ, his Son.

Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One;
give thanks, because he's given
Jesus Christ, his Son.

And now let the weak say 'I am strong',
let the poor say 'I am rich',
because of what the Lord has done for us;
and now let the weak say 'I am strong',
let the poor say 'I am rich',
because of what the Lord has done for us.

Give thanks...

Opening activity ~ Best friends and what we like about them

Confession

God our Father,
we come to you in sorrow for our sins.
For turning away from you,
and ignoring your will for our lives;
Father, forgive us:

All save us and help us.

For behaving just as we wish,
without thinking of you;
Father, forgive us:

All save us and help us.

For failing you by what we do,
and think and say;
Father, forgive us:

All save us and help us.

For letting ourselves be drawn away from you
by temptations in the world about us;
Father, forgive us:

All save us and help us.

For living as if we were ashamed
to belong to your Son;
Father, forgive us:

All save us and help us.

Absolution

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse us from our sins,
and restore us in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Collect (Prayer of the day)

Leader God our redeemer, you have delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of your son: grant, that as by His death He has recalled us to life, so by His continual presence in us He may raise us to eternal joy; through Jesus Christ your son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

All Amen

Everyday Faith ~ Doreen McKinnon

Hymn **Jesus you're my Superhero**

He's the one who makes the sun shine
He's the one who that puts the moon in
the sky
He's the one who hung the stars
One by one
He's the one who makes the birds sing
He's the one who makes your dreams so
high
He's the one who makes me smile
Day by day

Jesus you're my superhero

*You're my star, my best friend
Jesus you're my superhero
You're my star, my best friend*

Better than Spiderman
Better than Superman
Better than Batman
Better than anyone

Jesus you're my superhero...

Better than Yu Gi Yo
Better than Barbie
Better than Action Man
Better than anyone

Jesus you're my superhero...

Bible readings

John 15.9-17 ~ Andy Holcombe (St Mark's)

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

Acts 10.44-48 ~ Claire Lee (All Souls)

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. ⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, ⁴⁷ “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” ⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Sermon - Jonathan

You've got a friend in me

Who was your best friend as a child? Mine was Guy, a boy two years younger than me, who lived round the corner. I remember spending hours out on the school playing field playing football or cricket together or round



each other's houses playing with our Hot Wheels or jumping on beds and just having fun. There is something wonderful about having a great friend who wants to be with you, enjoys the things you do, who you can be yourself with. It was lovely to hear our young people talk about their best friends at the start of the service and why they liked them so much. I don't think at 11 and 9 Guy and I talked about deep things, but a friend with whom you can share your innermost thoughts without being judged is what we all need. Some of us find these in our spouses, some in other close friendships and some I know struggle with making or keeping good friends, but we were made for friendship.

Last week Geoff talked about 'Living with Jesus' as he looked at the image of Jesus being the vine and us the branches from John 15:1-8, and how we abide in him and bear fruit. This week we continue looking at Jesus' words in John 15 and what that relationship with Jesus looks like. The bible uses many different images of our relationship with God – Master and Servant, Father and Child, Shepherd and Sheep to name but a few. Those all have a hierarchical relationship, understandable because God is the Creator and we are the Created. So it probably came as a bit of a shock to the disciples when Jesus tells them in v15 "I no longer call you servants...Instead, I have called you friends."

In the Old Testament the Jews relationship with God was relatively distant. In Hebrew God was Yahweh, the one who brings everything into existence, or Adonai the Lord, or Elohim the sovereign God over all others. The Israelites were his children, chosen by God to be holy, set apart, living righteously to reveal Him to the nations. They enjoyed his favour above every other nation, but were still distant from God. Priests mediated to God on behalf of individual Israelites when they offered sacrifices for their sins. Whilst the Israelites as a nation were children of God, individuals only really felt closeness to God through their Jewish identity.

Only Moses and David I think ever had what could possibly be described as friendship with God. Exodus 33:11 says "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend." And David, especially through his Psalms, is seen as someone who talked to God like a friend, pouring his heart out, spending time in his presence.

With Jesus as rabbi and his disciples as pupils there was an assumed hierarchical relationship. In Jesus' time Jewish disciples were pupils of a specific teacher from whom they learned a particular outlook in religion or philosophy. They were like an apprentice,

learning from the wise master, hanging on their rabbi's every word, observing, imitating and studying all their rabbi's ways, seeing him as a spiritual father so that they too might become masters of the Word of God.

So you can see how radical it is from both an Old Testament perspective and the perspective of a disciple when Jesus tells his Jewish followers, steeped in the Torah, that they are his friends not merely his servants. I don't think Jesus totally removes the hierarchy between us and God in this statement and in many of his parables he uses master and servant as an allegory of himself and us. But what he is saying is that whilst we might in status be his servants, he calls us friends and treats us like friends. He says we must be his friends because he has revealed everything to us, whereas servants don't know all the details of their master's business, just the essentials to do their work. What he has revealed is the deep things friends reveal to each other – the truth, the secrets of life, the intimate details of his family and openness. He expressed his emotions: his joy at people being healed and having sins forgiven, his anger at the religious leaders, his anxiety about his death in the way that only friends do, not masters to servants.

Recently my family have been watching a new multi-part drama on Jesus' life called "The Chosen". It is available only on the internet and on an app, but what we like about it is that it approaches Jesus' life from the eyes of his followers. It tells the events of the gospels, but fills in what could be imagined as



happening in everyday conversations and activities as these men and women meet Jesus, are called to follow him and witness the Messiah's ministry. It imagines the relationship Jesus has with his disciples and very much portrays them as his friends. In "The Chosen's" depiction of Jesus and his followers we get a glimpse of what friendship with Jesus looks like.

But this friendship is a unique one. In one sense it is an unbalanced relationship – the divine creator with his far inferior creation. And that's not normal. Most friendships start off at least with people of similar status, even if some do rise up the ranks as it were. How many of us dare to be friends with royalty or celebrities? It doesn't generally happen. But God has chosen us to be his friends. As Jesus says in verse 16, "You did not choose me but I chose you". We are the chosen through God's act of grace, we have not earned or deserved to be his friends, we are in no ways naturally his equals. What a privilege!

The word 'chosen' speaks here not so much of it being exclusive, only for some, but of God doing the initiating. All are chosen, but many do not respond positively. Think of the rich young ruler in Luke 18 who Jesus called to follow him, but refused the invitation because Jesus asked him to sell what he had and give to the poor, too high a price he thought. But friendship with Jesus has a condition, we must do as he commands (v14). That may sound harsh - surely friendships should be unconditional we think. But let's think about our own friendships. Can we really remain friends with those who are not loyal to us, whose standards and values are the opposite to us, who disregard any of our imparted wisdom, who seek to take and never give. Of course not. If we are to be friends with Jesus, to remain in his love we need to follow Jesus' example of his relationship with his heavenly father of love, obedience and respect.

So if we have this privilege of being friends with Jesus what does it mean? As well as seeking to obey his commands (which we will sometimes fail at) there are 3 things I want to highlight:

1. **Cultivate that friendship.** This is primarily done through prayer. Time spent exclusively in his presence, worshipping with words or songs, reading his word, telling him what's on our hearts and of course listening to his voice. It is not always easy as we can't physical see or verbally hear him, but it's worth persevering with. Pray alone and pray with others. Can I encourage you to join in with the many ways we can pray alone or with others during Thy Kingdom Come starting on Thursday, details of which are in N&N and on our website.
2. **Bear fruit.** In v16 Jesus, continuing his image of the vine, calls us as his friends to bear fruit that will last. Friendship with him should not just be a cosy inward thing, but a relationship that blesses others through a desire to serve him, his church, his people. We bless others through helping bring about justice and God's kingdom values in this world and as we invite them to become Jesus' friends too.
3. **Love each other.** This passage shows the amazing love Jesus has for us and his desire that we should remain in his love as branches are attached to the vine. But our friendship with Jesus is not to be worked out as just an exclusive friendship, it is communal. All of us as God's friends are commanded to love each other as Jesus loves us. And that doesn't mean seeking friendships with people just like us, but mimicking God's grace by creating and sustaining relationships with a wide range of people, especially the marginalised, as Jesus did.

I've entitled this sermon 'You've got a friend in me', that great song from Toy Story where the toys all want to be Andy's best friend. Buzz Lightyear and Woody are rivals for that position, but ending up as best friends themselves, though very different. There is something there of the loving friendship with Jesus and each other that God wants us to have. And I love that phrase 'You've got a friend in me', because as someone who has struggled at times to make friends I know that I always have Jesus as a friend, someone who is always there for me and won't let me down. What a friend!



Hymn **Friend of God**

Who am I that you are mindful of me
That you hear me, when I call
Is it true that you are thinking of me
How you love me, it's amazing (Who am I Lord)

I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God
He calls me friend

Who am I that you are mindful of me....

God Almighty
Lord of Glory
You have called me friend

Affirmation of faith (We stand to declare our faith)

Leader We say together in faith
**All Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.**

Leader We believe in God the Father,
who created all things:
**All for by his will they were created
and have their being.**

Leader We believe in God the Son,
who was slain:
**All for with his blood,
he purchased us for God,
from every tribe and language,
from every people and nation.**

Leader

We believe in God the Holy Spirit:

All

the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'

Even so come, Lord Jesus!

Amen

Prayers ~ Clive Boyle (All Souls)

A prayer of thanks

We give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty of earth sky and sea; for the richness of mountains plains and rivers; for the songs of birds and the loveliness of flowers.

We praise you for these good gifts and pray that we may safeguard them for posterity. Grant that we may continue to grow in grateful enjoyment of your abundant creation, to the honour and glory of your name, now and for ever.

Amen

A prayer for forgiveness

Lord Jesus, you were called the friend of sinners, be my friend, for I acknowledge that I have sinned. Forgive the wrong that I have done and the right that I have failed to do; my secret and my more open sins; my sins of ignorance and my deliberate sins; sins to please myself and sins to please others; the sins which I remember, and the sins which I have forgotten; forgive all these, for it was for me also that you died. My Lord and Saviour.

Amen

A prayer for friends and family

Father God, we pray today for our friends, our families and our Christian community. We pray that we may always welcome the newcomer, the stranger and all who are vulnerable. We pray for all who are working to help others; for those who learn and those who teach them in these challenging times. We pray for all who struggle to fill their daily needs and fear for their future. We pray for all who feel alone or isolated. We pray for ourselves, all we are and think and feel. Father we place our world into your hands, in all things and all places may your will be done.

Amen

A prayer for the world and its leaders

Give wisdom to those in authority in every land, and give to all peoples a desire for righteousness and peace, the will to work together in trust, to seek the common good and to share with justice the resources of the earth.

Father, hear our prayer.

Amen

We pray for the sick, bereaved and troubled.

Today we remember in our prayers - Eileen and Peter Bliss, Patrick Chapman, Brenda Collard, John Hunter, Lynda Kirk, Barbara Lloyd, Trevor Lloyd, Catherine McCormack, Olive Park, Joy Storkey and Malcolm Pritchard.

Heavenly Father, we commend to your love and care those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit and especially those known to us: friends, family, members of the churches in this Parish. Please bring them your peace in their pain, your strength in their weakness and your comfort in their sadness.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

A prayer for the church

Enable this church to do your will

Make it vulnerable that it may speak with calm humility

Make it outward looking that it may care deeply

Make it a community of peacemakers and bridge builders

In the midst of turbulence let the church make space

for the hearing of your still small voice.

Amen

And finally we join together in the prayer that Jesus himself taught us:

**All Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

**For the Kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen**

Notices *(See Notes & News)*

Hymn I Stand amazed

I stand amazed in the presence
of Jesus the Nazarene,
and wonder how he could love me,
a sinner, condemned, unclean.

*How marvellous! How wonderful!
And my song shall ever be:
How marvellous! How wonderful!
Is my Saviour's love for me!*

He took my sins and my sorrows,
he made them his very own;
he bore the burden to Calvary,
and suffered and died alone.

How Marvellous...

When with the ransomed in glory
his face I at last shall see,
'twill be my joy through the ages
to sing of his love for me.

How Marvellous...

The dismissal

The peace of God,
which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.

All Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

Worshipping ▶ Loving ▶ Sharing ▶ Growing

