



One Page Sermon

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What a friend we have in Jesus

“What a friend we have in Jesus,” is the beginning to a beloved hymn. It is an expression of joy at being able to call upon Jesus for help through difficult times. Another favorite hymn of many people, “In the Garden,” contains the line, “and he walks with me and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.” Of course, generations of Sunday school students have learned that “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

The idea of Jesus being our friend is deeply embedded into the songs of the Church, and yet the idea that Jesus is our friend is also derided by some theologians, scholars, and Christians who believe that such a designation feels too colloquial. Jesus is one part of the triune God, the Son of God, the immortal and eternal Christ. Friend? That just feels too small. While “In the Garden” is a favorite hymn of many, others mock it as being too small-minded, and perhaps even narcissistic. “None other has ever known”? Really? They ask.

There is a danger when we think of Jesus as our friend—that our faith can become insular. It can become about “Jesus and me,” and we can lose sight of what it means to follow Christ. If Jesus is relegated only to our own personal friend, then we may miss the part about forgiving others, feeding the hungry, walking on water and into foreign lands, and being willing to stand up to the powers of this world so that his mission would not die on the Cross. In other words, if we only focus as Jesus and me, we might forget about Jesus and the Kingdom. We might forget about Jesus and the world.

Yet friendship is no small phenomenon. Friendship is a powerful connection that can bring people together, make them stronger, help them endure, and make the world better. True friendship—the kind where people are willing to lay their life down for each other—is about more than kind words and gentle strolls through a garden. True friendship is about mutuality, sacrifice, compassion, forgiveness, and the kind of love that endures and lifts up. Friendship was at the heart of Jesus’ ministry.

There is a reason he called 12 others to be with him. Even Jesus yearned for friendship. He was a friend not only to the 12, but as the Scriptures tell us, he was a friend to tax collectors and sinners. Jesus was a friend to women, lifted up children as exemplars of faith and after all, who makes friends easier than children?

Friendship, I should add, is at the very heart of who God is. God is relationship. God is Creator, Christ, and Spirit. Genesis 1 tells us that in the beginning God was utterly alone, and it was God’s breath that swept over the waters to create relationship. First light and dark, and eventually humanity in its rich diversity. Genesis 2 reminds us that God created a human, but found that the human was not happy alone. It was not until the human could have a partner—a mutual protector and friend—that God could step back and allow the man and woman to connect to the world.

Friendship is not some simple matter or loose relationship. Friendship is built on bonds of mutuality. Friends divide our sorrow and multiply our joy and raise us to heights we cannot reach alone. Stop and consider the friends in your life who have acted in this way.

Now stop and consider that among those friends is Jesus, the one who gathered with his friends and washed their feet. He broke bread with them. He knew that they would deny him, betray him, and abandon him. Yet he called them friend—and he reminded them that their task was to befriend others.

As followers of Christ we have the incredible honor to call Jesus friend. What a friend he is! Now we are called to befriend others, connect to others, forgive others, and build each other up so that the friends of Jesus may rebuild the world and God’s Kingdom.

