

Acts 10:44-48 and John 15:9-17

What a friend! I was playing around with saying these three words and just by changing the emphasis and tone of voice, you can mean totally different things: WHAT A FRIEND! What a FRIEND! What? A Friend?

To me a friend is someone you can pick up with even after years of being apart. A friend is someone with whom you have shared some history...some part of your life, having good and sad memories together. You may find a new friend just about anywhere...someone you share ideas with, you laugh with, you have a meal with...sometimes a good friend can be someone you disagree with!

But a friend is someone who doesn't make you feel like a shmuck. A friend is someone who affirms the better parts of yourself, just as you do for them. A friend is someone you can be honest with; you can have differences of opinions...but you know that it will *always*, be all right.

Let us be in prayer: Friendly God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

In this farewell speech that Jesus gave, according to John--- love is emphasized over and over. God/Christ as loving and caring shepherd. God/Christ as the source of love from which we are rooted, as in the story of the vine and branches. And here, Jesus asks again that we... love one another as God loves....

Do you believe....that God loves you? Some may have a hard time thinking about an entity called "God" who loves...but perhaps you know this love...in beauty, in relationships, in times of quiet prayer/meditation... even in times of crisis. You get a sense that there is something Holy...out there....and in here.

Lynne White said that it seems like every time she teaches Sunday School...it is about "love"! And so it is....and so it is.

While *each* one of us is called to be ministers of this Way of compassion...Henri Nouwen writes that "The mystery of ministry is that we have been called to make our own limited and very conditional love, the gateway for the unlimited and unconditional love of God!" Our own humanness...is not an obstacle but a gateway!

The part of the text that grabbed me was this part about friendship. Imagine the disciples of Jesus. For three years they had been following him...like little puppies

lapping up his love. Lapping up that love that proved to be powerful and life-changing and pointed them all to God!

They called Jesus their Master...they obeyed whatever he asked of them: get some colts, bring the lame to be healed, listen to my stories, pray, care for the widows, the orphans and the imprisoned, feed these suffering people with the bread that you have--and never be afraid.

Now, Jesus says that the disciples are no longer servants. The puppies have grown up. They have experienced how the teachings and love of Jesus has transformed lives. Jesus tells them they are in on the big picture --- in a sense, he is raising them up and he calls them friends!

What....a friend!

Many of you pray to Jesus...some of you pray to a larger sense of the Divine, to God... for some of you, Jesus IS God. Some of you pray to Mary...that is beautiful, too. Only you know how prayer works for you. The Sacred that is infinite *and* intimate...is larger than names and "how-tos"! God "shows up" in so many ways... but we might ask if God/Christ/Spirit...is our friend? It is about a relationship.

I have had beautiful friends....but I had one friend in elementary school that was awful....that doesn't sound very loving! In Albion, Michigan, where I grew up, I walked about a mile to the elementary school and sometimes with a girl who lived nearby named Diane...she bragged a lot. She criticized me constantly.... and one time in efforts to impress a little boy who decided to walk with us, she started hitting me on the head with her book...laughing joyously. WHAT a friend!!! I quit walking with her and then she moved away! Not all "friends" play nice!

Do we "play nice" with Jesus...do we criticize him?...Do *we* "get it"...this Way that he demonstrated; this nonviolent but powerful love that was active in the world? Might we be a friend to Jesus by standing up for those who suffer in our world? Next Monday people will be demonstrating with the Poor People's Campaign focusing on children, women, youth and disabilities. Are we friends with Jesus when we care for our earth?

Charles Cousar writes that being friends with Jesus means, "Being captured by the story!" I would add, "And living it in our world."

One time I wrote a letter to Jesus...like a pen pal. It was a beautiful exercise...you just start writing and asking questions and then Jesus starts writing and an amazing

conversation unfolds...I actually resolved my deep grief over the loss of my mother by doing this.

Friendship is also about the pleasure of small things in our everyday lives. Hear these words from the well-known prophet and poet, Kahlil Gibran:

*And in the sweetness of friendship, let there be laughter, and sharing of pleasures.
For in the dew of little things, the heart finds its morning and is refreshed*

Being friends with Jesus means joining him at the Communion Table with an openness of spirit. We share this meal together, remembering Jesus' words and incredible love. We take it all into ourselves that we might share it fully with others.

Carmelo Alvarez says "Communion is a commitment of solidarity toward unity --- as a witness in a broken and divided world."

Perhaps we might think in new ways of Jesus as friend...as we prepare to share in Communion together now...Amen.