

Sermon for Morning Prayer: Trinity VII

The Reverend Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate

First Lesson: Ecclesiasticus 6:5-17 (KJV).

“... Sweet language will multiply friends: and a fairspeaking tongue will increase kind greetings. Be in peace with many: nevertheless have but one counsellor of a thousand. If thou wouldest get a friend, prove him first and be not hasty to credit him. For some man is a friend for his own occasion, and will not abide in the day of thy trouble. And there is a friend, who being turned to enmity, and strife will discover thy reproach. Again, some friend is a companion at the table, and will not continue in the day of thy affliction. But in thy prosperity he will be as thyself, and will be bold over thy servants. If thou be brought low, he will be against thee, and will hide himself from thy face. Separate thyself from thine enemies, and take heed of thy friends. A faithful friend is a strong defence: and he that hath found such an one hath found a treasure. Nothing doth countervail a faithful friend, and his excellency is invaluable. A faithful friend is the medicine of life; and they that fear the Lord shall find him. Whoso feareth the Lord shall direct his friendship aright: for as he is, so shall his neighbour be also.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: St. John 15:12-27 (KJV).

“... This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained

you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another. If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause. But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text: “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”
St. John 15:14 (RSV).

Body:

In an ancient oriental kingdom there was a very special class of people known as “the friends of the king.” These people were on the most intimate terms with the king, and enjoyed privileges that most people could hardly conceive of.

sion in human form of what the Father desires and intends for us all.

St. John says, “If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” By our obedience to His commandment we are drawn into the life of Christ, and by being drawn into His life we are drawn into the life of God.

We become friends of the King. We have access to Him at any time. We need no special invitation to join Him at his table. We may sit with Him in silence and enjoy His company. We may ask for anything we need, and be confident that we will receive it. That is the relationship that Jesus offers us and desires to have with us. And so He says, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

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They had the full freedom of the palace and all its resources. They had access to the king at any hour of the day or night without an appointment. They could dine at his table whenever they wanted without an invitation. The friends of the king could enter the royal bedroom first thing in the morning and join the king for breakfast. The king would listen to them, enjoy their company, and grant them special favors and requests.

Such is the status that Jesus offers to all those who acknowledge His kingship and obey His commands.

Not everyone enjoys this relationship with Jesus because not everyone acknowledges who He is. Those who acknowledge that He is the incarnation of God are those who obey His commandment. And what does He command us? Listen to His words: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

And how is it that Jesus has loved us? He has loved us in spite of our sins and with full knowledge of our many shortcomings and faults. He has loved us when we have failed to return His love. He has loved us when our behavior has been totally unacceptable to Him. He will not accept our sinful behavior, and He will not allow us to settle for anything less than a full and true reflection of the nature of God. Nevertheless, Jesus has loved us to the point of laying down His life for us. Such is the friendship that He offers us, and such is the friendship He requires of us with respect to each other.

Friendship, of course, means more than just access and more than just acceptance. Friendship means intimacy. It means sharing secrets. True friendship means that you know what your friend is really like. You know her philosophy of life. You know what he likes and does not like. You know how she thinks. You know his moral standards. You know what motivates her. You know his plans and his

dreams, her hopes and her fears. You know the private *persona* that is behind the public *persona*. You know his faults, but you like him anyway. That is what it means to have a friend.

There is a great hunger in the world today for that kind of intimacy. Unfortunately, people today tend to think of intimacy in terms of sex. So when the Bible says that the heart of Jonathan was knit to the heart of David, and that David loved Jonathan as he loved his own soul, there are those who interpret that to mean that the two men were homosexually involved with each other. Definitely an unwarranted assumption.

Some people think, wrongly I hasten to add, that sex will produce intimacy. That is one reason people engage in sexual activity before marriage. It is also why there is such pressure in our day for homosexually oriented people to receive approval for engaging in genital sex. In so many cases it is really the intimacy that people want, and the sex is wrongly seen as a necessary component of it.

On the other hand, there are those who shy away from intimacy. They refuse to share experiences or hopes or fears or any other really personal material. They keep their thoughts and their feelings to themselves and hold everyone at a safe psychological distance. In other words, they have no friends, and tend to be very lonely.

The apostolic writers, when they talk about the Church, invariably emphasize both intimacy and chastity among the faithful. The author of Hebrews says, "Let brotherly love continue.... Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.... Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."

St. James says, "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

St. Peter says, "Have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called that you may obtain a blessing."

St. Paul says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

These are all apostolic elaborations of Our Lord's commandment.

We are able to treat each other that way, or should be able to, because we are all under the authority of the same Lord. We acknowledge the same duty. We are led by the same Spirit. We have similar experiences and similar values. If that were not true it would be very difficult to be friends with each other. We would have very little to say to each other and would probably not be very comfortable in each other's presence.

Conclusion:

But Jesus calls us to friendship with each other by inviting us to friendship with Himself. He says to His disciples, "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

To be a friend of Christ is to know the mind of God, because Jesus is the living manifestation, the perfect expres-