

Call to Worship Proverbs 18:24; John 15:13-17

There are persons for companionship, but then there are friends who are more loyal than family.

No one has greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends.

Jesus said: "You are my friends if you do what I command you. I don't call you servants any longer, because servants don't know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you.

You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last. As a result, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. I give you these commandments so that you can love each other."

Prayer of Invocation

Lord, send your Holy Spirit to fill us this day as we come to you open and ready to receive. Guide our minds and our hearts in the direction your wind blows so we can reach beyond ourselves to the people you place in our paths. May we gather from you the nourishment to feed our souls. Amen

The Word Job 2:11-13; Proverbs 27:6

When Job's three friends heard about all this disaster that had happened to him, they came, each one from his home...**They agreed to come so they could console and comfort him.**

When they looked up from a distance and didn't recognize him, they wept loudly. Each one tore his garment and scattered dust above his head toward the sky. **They sat with Job on the ground seven days and seven nights, not speaking a word to him, for they saw that he was in excruciating pain.**

Trustworthy are the bruises of a friend; excessive are the kisses of an enemy.

Living the Word

A lot can be said about friends. First there is the difference between family and friends: You may have heard the statement "You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your family." For the most part, we don't get to choose our relatives, but in theory – we, that share the same blood, are similar in genetic ways, often raised within the same family traditions and experiences so should get along well as family.

Reality is sometimes different from theory... and last week I shared how a friend can become family as they become more and more a part of our lives. As we build relationships, overlooking or appreciating our differences, we can care enough about them to invite them into our closest circle called family, possibly even into our church family...

Friends can be acquaintances that grow into more as you spend time with them. Three years ago, I was invited to volunteer at Ruby's Pantry. There I found an old friend, Joey, that I knew from when my boys were in 4-H. After working out of the community for 16 years it was good to reconnect.

I also met a new friend, Shirley, who I found to have a sincere heart and good humor. I look forward every month when the three of us meet to work registration for Ruby's. We are comrades, doing our part to feed the community. Through the years we have shared our families, our joys and concerns and our theologies. We are now good enough friends that it feels ok to share ourselves without judgement, even if we might not agree.

What really is the makeup of true friendship? A good place to start to answer that is in the scriptures. The Bible gives us examples of most all relationships from which we can draw answers for our relationships. The first friendship that comes to my mind is from the book of Samuel: David and Jonathan. David, son of Jesse, comes to us first of the slingshot fame facing Goliath, the giant. He then went into service of King Saul as a harp player, advisor and eventually a military leader. Jonathan was the son of Saul, in the service of his father, as a military leader.

Rabbi Duran, 14th century Spain, gives the Jewish interpretation of the significance of this story: "Anyone who establishes a friendship for access to power, money, or sexual relationships; when these ends are not attainable, the friendship ceases...love that is not dependent on selfish ends is true love of the other person since there is no intended end."

The mainstream Christian interpretation says that David and Jonathan's love is understood as the intimate camaraderie between two young soldiers. Their mutual love was certainly regarded by the editors [of the book of Samuel] as faithful and passionate.

Another Biblical example is the story of Job, which wrestles with the question of suffering and God's goodness. The main character, Job was a wealthy man who lived a semi-nomadic existence. The story tells how he was suddenly caught up in a series of disasters and personal suffering. The heart of the problem for Job was to find an answer to the dilemma why there is human suffering and how a loving God can allow it. A further complication is the fact that Job really hadn't done anything, humanly speaking, to deserve the disasters as a punishment of his transgressions.

The dramatic dialogue between Job and his three friends about the relation of suffering to human behavior, and Job's passionate attack on God himself, have made the book of Job one of the all-time favorite classics of world literature. Today we want to focus on how the writer of Job skillfully describes the contest between Job and his friends: Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, as they labored over the question of the cause of Job's plight.

The task of his friends is to present the traditional arguments: 'If you're suffering, that's because you sinned...you must have done something wrong, or your children did...' or 'It's because God loves you: God always punishes those whom God loves...' Ouch, those words are painful when you are already in pain.

But all of that was after they first arrived: "*When they looked up from a distance and didn't recognize him, they wept loudly. Each one tore his garment and scattered dust above his head toward the sky. They sat with Job on the ground seven days and seven nights, not speaking a word to him, for they saw that he was in excruciating pain.*"

Now that is friendship...coming from a distance to just be a presence with you when you are hurting; seven days and seven nights, of silence, radiating a loving presence. As Job was going through the stages of grief beginning with 'this can't really be happening' moving into the 'why is this happening?' the friends just sat with him quietly.

What was going on in their heads? 'I wonder what he did to deserve this?' 'Lord, you must love him a lot to test him in these ways...' So on the eighth day as Job is asking for the answer to his plight, they challenge Job to consider their suspicions. Isn't that also friendship?

To love someone enough to point out that they have something green stuck between their teeth? Or that they have a big stain on their clothing? Or that they have said something offensive? from Proverbs 27:6 "*Trustworthy are the bruises of a friend; excessive are the kisses of an enemy.*" How much punishment can a friendship handle?

In chapter 19 (3-6, 13-19), just after the three friends have spoken, Job addresses them with these words: *These ten times you've humiliated me; shamelessly you insult me. Have I really gone astray? If so, my error remains hidden inside me. If you look down on me and use my disgrace to criticize me, know then that God has wronged me and enclosed his net over me.*

He has distanced my family from me; my acquaintances are also alienated from me. My visitors have ceased; those who know me have forgotten me. My guests and female servants think me a stranger; I'm a foreigner in their sight. I call my servant, and he doesn't answer; I myself must beg him. My breath stinks to my wife; I am odious to my children. Even the young despise me; I get up, and they rail against me. All my closest friends despise me; the ones I have loved turn against me.

As it turns out, these friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar are no help to him at all with their words. Their charges were false, their theology was wrong, and they did not help him physically. But, let me be quick to say, they did come!

They were shocked that this powerful man had lost everything, and they were hurt at his predicament, and really did not know what to say. At one point Job indicated that their silence would be more comfort than their words (13:3).

What kind of blessing are you to your friends, especially when they need you? And so we move on - How many times in your life have you gotten close in friendship with someone, just to have them move away and leaving you feeling alone? Or you have been hurt by a friend or friends, who seem to have moved on without you?

At a younger age, I had only a few friends and they were one-by-one moving into new vocations, and far away from me. I was down to one close friend, who had become so dear to me that when I knew our time was soon to end.

I prayed for peace in my breaking heart. Exhausted, I laid down for a nap and saw Christ coming to me saying "Don't you know I will be with you always?" When I awoke, I did have a peace about things and God has through the years blessed me with many close friends.

On the night of his arrest, Jesus sat with his friends and broke bread and shared the cup of life. They were confused, scared, and one even had betrayal on his mind. Jesus spoke of a new friend he would be sending –the Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus says to each one of us – and that means even you... "*You are my friends if you do what I command you. I don't call you servants any longer, because servants don't know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you.*"

You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you could go and produce fruit and so that your fruit could last. As a result, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. I give you these commandments so that you can love each other."

How are you doing as a friend to the people God has brought into your life? In your life be grateful for the friends that you have been given, especially Christ. We can come in joy for that true example of friendship, which we can live out being blessed by blessing others.

Jesus also said: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." And that is what he did! As we come to Holy Communion we give to God the Great Thanksgiving for the true friend that we have in Jesus, who gave his all – knowledge, love and physical self for us. In the bread and cup, we remember how he gave all of himself for our friendship. Each time you give of yourself for another, you wear the face of Christ to the world.

Holy Communion (You are invited to have bread and some liquid or juice ready to eat and drink after you read the words below).

God's Spirit is with you. **And also with you.** Lift up your hearts. **We lift them up to God.** Let us give thanks and praise to God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is right and we are glad to be able to give you thanks, gracious God. In the beginning your Spirit moved across the waters, and creation began. You made human beings in your image to live in community with you. When we sinned and fell away, your Spirit called us back. You promised always to be with us and sent your Spirit to fulfill that promise.

And so, with people from all times and places, in every language, with all creation we praise your name: **Holy, Holy, Holy God, Wind and Flame and Dove, Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the One who comes in the name of our God. Hosanna in the highest.**

Blessed is your child Jesus Christ, in unity with you and the Holy Spirit. At the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, your Spirit descended on him like a dove, saying "This is my Beloved." Jesus promised that when he left the disciples the Advocate, the Spirit of truth, would come. Through the church you have given us this meal, that we might remember Jesus who took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his followers saying, "This is my body, given for you." Through the power of your Holy Spirit, generations have passed this tradition that we might remember Jesus who said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." It is your Spirit which enlivens the mystery of faith: **Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.**

Send your blessed Spirit on us gathered here and on these elements, fill us and them with your presence. Enflame our hearts that we might be as the early church, ready to preach your good news to all the world, eager to live as your Spirit-filled people. All praise and thanks, glory and honor is yours, Holy Trinity, now and forever. **Amen.**

Say: The Lord's Prayer

This bread is the body of Christ given for you. (eat the bread)
This juice is the cup of blessing poured out for you. (drink the juice)
Amen.