

"BE A FRIEND"
JOHN 15:9-17
SIXTH S. OF EASTER
MESSIAH, BOERNE
MAY 5, 2024

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

TEXT: JN 15:9-17

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT IDEAS ABOUT WHAT GOD IS LIKE.
FOR EXAMPLE, SOME PEOPLE BELIVE HE IS LIKE A DISINTERESTED
WATCHMAKER WHO MADE THE UNIVERSE, WOUND IT UP, AND THEN LET
IT BE, HAVING NO FURTHER USE OF IT. OTHER PEOPLE THINK OF
GOD AS A GREAT POLICEMAN IN THE SKY WHO GAVE US A BOOK OF
LAWS WE MUST OBEY AND NOW WATCHES US TO SEE WHETHER WE KEEP
THEM OR NOT, SO WE HAD BETTER BE CAREFUL TO AVOID HIM BY
STAYING AWAY FROM PLACES HE'S LIKELY TO BE FOUND—LIKE IN
CHURCHES! PERHAPS THE MOST WIDELY HELD MISCONCEPTION IN
AMERICA IS OF GOD AS A KIND GRANDFATHER—BEARDED, ALWAYS
SMILING, SITTING IN A ROCKING CHAIR ON THAT GREAT BIG FRONT
PORCH IN THE SKY. HE'S ALWAYS AVAILABLE TO HELP YOU DO
WHATEVER YOU WANT TO DO.

WELL, WHATEVER THE HUMAN IDEA ABOUT GOD MAY BE—
DISINTERESTED WATCHMAKER, GREAT POLICEMAN, KIND
GRANDFATHER—NONE OF THESE PORTRAY GOD AS HE *REALLY* IS. IF
ONE OF THESE IS *YOUR* IDEA OF WHAT GOD IS LIKE, THEN, AS J.

B. PHILLIPS SAYS, "YOUR GOD IS TOO SMALL." HOWEVER, THE WORDS OF JESUS IN OUR GOSPEL TEXT TODAY REVEAL GOD AS HE REALLY IS: GOD IS OUR FRIEND.

GOD IS A TRUE FRIEND. HE'S MY FRIEND. HE'S YOUR FRIEND. THE BIBLE CALLS THE DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM GOD'S FRIENDS (2 CHR 20:7). INDEED, GOD IS A TRUE FRIEND TO ALL PEOPLE WHO, LIKE ABRAHAM, FEAR, LOVE, AND TRUST IN HIM AS HE REVEALS HIMSELF TO BE THROUGH HIS WORD, THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

CHRISTIANS ARE SUCH PEOPLE WHO FEAR, LOVE, AND TRUST IN GOD. THEY HAVE RECEIVED GOD'S INVITATION TO FRIENDSHIP WRITTEN IN HIS HOLY WORD, THE BIBLE. IN FACT, IT CAN BE SAID THAT THE ESSENCE OF BEING A CHRISTIAN IS HAVING FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

ONE OF THE THINGS WE WANT TO DO HERE AT MESSIAH LUTHERAN CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL IS TO ENCOURAGE AND STRENGTHEN A RELATIONSHIP OF FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST WITH EVERYONE TOUCHED BY OUR MINISTRY. GOD ESTABLISHES THAT RELATIONSHIP BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKING THROUGH HIS WORD AND IN THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM. HE STRENGTHENS THAT RELATIONSHIP BY FEEDING US WITH JESUS' TRUE BODY AND BLOOD IN THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR. JESUS IS GOD'S ONE AND ONLY SON AND THE ANOINTED AND APPOINTED SAVIOR OF THE WHOLE WORLD. AS THE UNIQUE GOD-MAN, JESUS

REVEALS GOD'S TRUE AND TRIUNE NATURE TO US. IN JESUS WE SEE GOD'S FRIENDSHIP TOWARD US.

LOVE IS AT THE CORE OF GOD'S FRIENDSHIP WITH US THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. YOU SEE, REAL FRIENDSHIP GIVES LOVE SACRIFICIALLY. WE SEE GOD'S LOVE IN THE WILLING SACRIFICE OF JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS OF CALVARY. JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS FOR YOU AND ME AND ALL PEOPLE. BY HIS LOVING SACRIFICE ON THE CROSS, HE BALANCED THE BOOKS OF GOD'S JUSTICE IN OUR PLACE. THROUGH HIS CRUCIFIXION FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD IS MADE AND WE ARE SET FREE FROM SIN TO LOVE EACH OTHER AS FRIENDS.

THE SACRIFICIAL LOVE OF FRIENDSHIP IS ILLUSTRATED BY A STORY FROM THE HISTORY OF JAPAN. ABOUT A HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO, A SEASIDE VILLAGE WAS STARTLED BY AN EARTHQUAKE. BUT BEING ACCUSTOMED TO EARTHQUAKES, EVERYONE SOON RETURNED TO THEIR REGULAR ACTIVITIES. HOWEVER, ONE MAN STOOD HIGH ABOVE THE VILLAGE ON A PLATEAU. AS HE LOOKED OUT AT THE SEA, HE NOTICED SOMETHING STRANGE. THE WATER APPEARED DARK, MOVING AGAINST THE WIND, RUNNING AWAY FROM THE LAND. HE KNEW WHAT THIS MEANT. IT MEANT A TSUNAMI, OR TIDAL WAVE, WAS COMING.

HE WANTED TO WARN THE VILLAGERS DOWN BELOW, BUT HOW? HE CALLED TO HIS SON, "QUICK, BRING ME A TORCH." IN THE FIELDS BEHIND HIM LAY HIS MAGNIFICENT CROP OF RICE. IT WAS

PILED IN TALL STACKS, READY FOR THE MARKET, AND WORTH A FORTUNE. THE OLD MAN TOOK THE TORCH HIS GRANDSON HAD BROUGHT HIM AND LIT THE RICE. "GRANDFATHER," HIS GRANDSON CRIED OUT, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO YOUR CROP?!" HE TURNED TO HIS GRANDSON WITH TEARS IN HIS EYES AND SIMPLY SAID, "SON, IN TIME YOU WILL UNDERSTAND."

THE PEOPLE BELOW SAW THE THICK, BLACK SMOKE. THEY ALL RUSHED UP THE HILL TO PUT OUT THE FIRE. WHEN THEY GOT UP THE HILL, THE OLD MAN TOLD THEM TO TURN AROUND AND LOOK DOWN AT THE SEA. THEY SAW A HUGE WAVE COMING TOWARD THE LAND. IT STRUCK THE SHORE WITH A SOUND LIKE THUNDER AND TORE THEIR HOMES TO PIECES LIKE MATCHSTICKS. THE WAVES STRUCK AGAIN AND AGAIN. THEN FINALLY THE SEA FELL SILENT.

NO WORD WAS SPOKEN. NOW THE GRANDSON UNDERSTOOD. THEY ALL UNDERSTOOD. THE OLD MAN NO LONGER WAS A RICH MAN, BUT BY HIS SACRIFICE HE HAD SAVED MORE THAN 400 OF HIS FRIENDS, AND THEY WERE FOREVER GRATEFUL TO HIM.

JESUS SACRIFICED HIMSELF, NOT FOR JUST 400 PEOPLE, BUT FOR *EVERYONE*—INCLUDING YOU AND ME—BECAUSE WE ARE HIS FRIENDS. LISTEN ONCE AGAIN TO JESUS' WORDS:

GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS, THAT SOMEONE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS. YOU ARE MY FRIENDS IF YOU DO WHAT I COMMAND YOU . . . LOVE ONE ANOTHER. (JN 15:13-14, 17)

JESUS DIED ON THE CROSS FOR YOU AND ME. HE MADE PEACE BY MEANS OF HIS BODY AND THEREBY ESTABLISHED A RELATIONSHIP OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND US. AND HE TELLS US THE KEY TO REMAINING IN THAT FRIENDSHIP: OBEDIENCE TO HIS COMMAND TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. YET GOD'S FRIENDSHIP IS NOT DEPENDENT ON OUR PERFECT OBEDIENCE TO THIS "NEW," OR ANY "OLD," COMMAND. RATHER, IT'S BASED ON GOD'S GREAT LOVE AND MERCY TOWARD US IN JESUS.

YOU SEE, GOD APPROACHES US IN A *NON-JUDGMENTAL* WAY. YES, HE HAS A BOOK OF LAWS, THE BIBLE, AND HE HAS GIVEN US A SUMMARY OF HIS LAWS IN THE TEN COMMANDMENTS. WE CONTINUOUSLY BREAK THOSE LAWS BY WHAT WE ARE AND AREN'T AND BY WHAT WE DO AND FAIL TO DO. BUT GOD IS NOT LIKE A POLICEMAN, WAITING TO CATCH US IN HIS SPEED TRAP. INSTEAD, OUT OF HIS GREAT LOVE FOR US, HE SENT HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST, TO TAKE OUR PLACE UNDER HIS LAWS. BECAUSE OF THE PERFECT OBEDIENCE OF CHRIST, YOU AND I CAN NO LONGER BE ACCUSED BY THE DEVIL OR ANYONE ELSE BECAUSE OF OUR SINS (ROM 8:33-34). AS WHEN JESUS WENT TO ZACCHAEUS' HOUSE, SO HE COMES TO US TO SEEK, ACCEPT, FORGIVE, AND SAVE THE LOST (LK 19:10).

GOD'S FRIENDSHIP MEANS HE *SHARES* HIMSELF WITH US. JESUS SAYS IN OUR TEXT: "I HAVE CALLED YOU MY FRIENDS, FOR EVERYTHING THAT I LEARNED FROM MY FATHER I HAVE MADE KNOWN

TO YOU" (V 15). WHEN WE REGULARLY ATTEND CHURCH SERVICES, SUNDAY SCHOOL, ADULT BIBLE CLASS, AND RECEIVE THE LORD'S SUPPER, WE COME TO KNOW GOD THROUGH JESUS (JN 1:18). IN JESUS WE KNOW GOD WEEPS OVER OUR SIN AND ITS TERRIBLE CONSEQUENCE OF DEATH. IN JESUS WE ALSO KNOW THAT GOD REJOICES WHEN WE ABIDE IN HIS LOVE. IN JESUS WE KNOW GOD HAS TENDER FEELINGS TOWARD US.

GOD'S FRIENDSHIP ALSO MEANS HE *RESPECTS* US. MUTUAL RESPECT IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF ANY FRIENDSHIP, CERTAINLY IN OUR FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD. JESUS SEEKS OUR RESPONSE OF RESPECT IN OUR TEXT WHEN HE SAYS, "YOU ARE MY FRIENDS IF YOU DO WHAT I COMMAND" (V 14). WE SHOW WE RESPECT GOD'S FRIENDSHIP WITH US WHEN WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER. GOD IS YOUR FRIEND, SO BE A FRIEND TO HIM—AND TO OTHER PEOPLE.

THE WORLD NEEDS MORE FRIENDSHIPS, YOU KNOW. ALTHOUGH MARRIAGE ISN'T FOR EVERYBODY, STATISTICS SHOW THAT MARRIED PEOPLE WHO ARE FRIENDS LIVE LONGER. STUDIES ALSO SHOW THAT LITTLE BABIES WHO ARE NOT SHOWN FRIENDSHIP BY CUDDLING MAY DIE PREMATURELY. OLDER FOLKS ALSO MAY DIE PREMATURELY IF THEY FEEL THEY HAVE NO FRIENDS. GOOD FRIENDSHIPS KEEP US HEALTHY, SO BE A FRIEND AND BRING LIFE TO SOMEONE!

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, WE AMERICANS ARE GREAT DOERS, BUILDERS, AND ACHIEVERS, BUT GENERALLY WE ARE NOT A VERY CONTEMPLATIVE SOCIETY. ACTION SEEMS MORE HIGHLY VALUED

THAN *BEING*. NEVERTHELESS, THE FOUNDATION FOR ALL THAT WE DO IS *WHO* AND *WHAT* WE ARE. BY GOD'S GRACE WE ARE CHRISTIANS, AND FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST IS THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY. THE QUALITY OF OUR RELATIONSHIPS OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP IN CHRIST WITH GOD AND EACH OTHER IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN *ANYTHING* WE DO. SO, REMEMBER: *GOD* IS YOUR *GREATEST* FRIEND, SO YOU, TOO, *BE A FRIEND*; IN JESUS' NAME. AMEN.